

# FIGHT RACISM! FIGHT IMPERIALISM!

Revolutionary Communist Group

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## RULING CLASS back in power



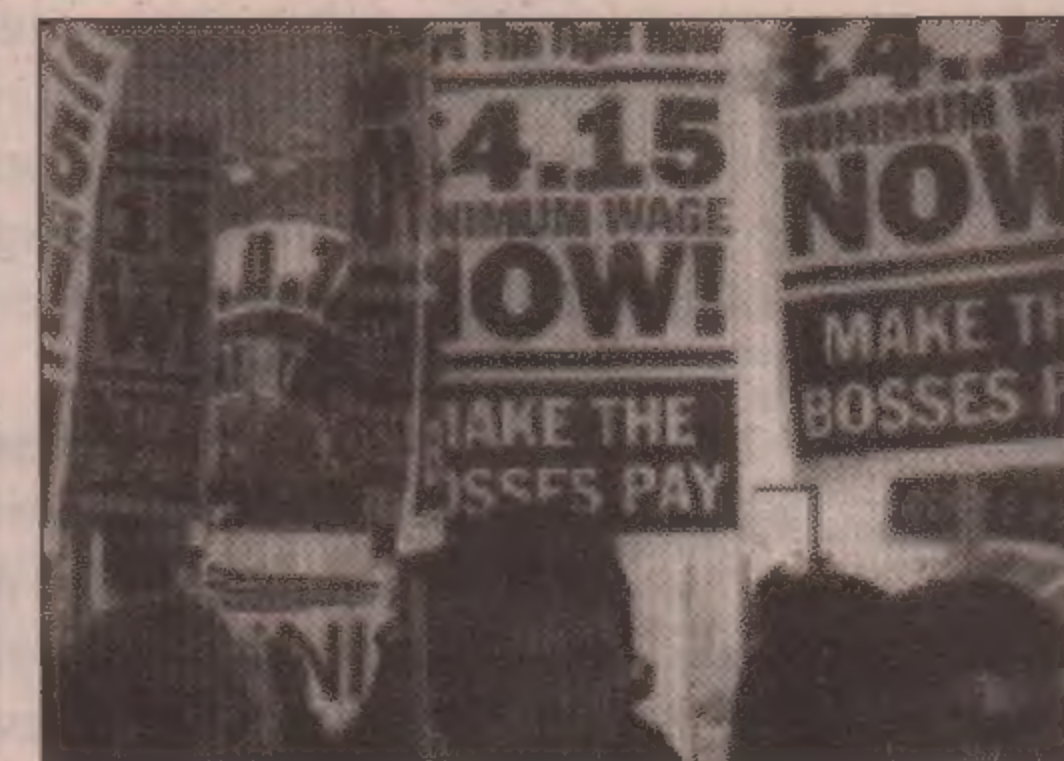
Liverpool dockers marched for justice, supported by socialists, pensioners, road and environment protestors. All the demonstrators knew that, with Labour in power, if you want justice you will have to fight for it

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# ORGANISE the fightback



# The ruling class is back in power

Of course the ruling class didn't lose power at any point. But in saying that they are back in power, we are pointing to the fact that Labour would not have won the election without the full support of the ruling class, and that the most powerful capitalists expect Labour to defend their interests in a world of intensifying inter-imperialist rivalries. This will involve an enormous attack on working class conditions which will extend and intensify what the Tories did over 18 years. The scale of the onslaught will be such that even sections of the middle class whose votes were decisive in ensuring Labour's landslide victory will be targeted. Those working, in particular, in the state sector, in education, local government and the health service will suddenly find that there is no promised land, no favours because of their privileged status. They too could face the threat of being thrown into the ranks of the working class, of being condemned to share a life of poverty and oppression.

Such conditions will force the working class to create new forms of organisation to defend its interests, and even, perhaps, to breathe new life into those already existing, but which currently serve the interests of more affluent sections, such as the trade union movement. Commenting on the high rate of abstention in inner-city areas, *Socialist Worker* laments that it 'was one important weakness in Labour's victory'. This is a rather silly comment given Labour's victory will not bring a single benefit to the working class. Potentially, such abstentionism marks a step forward, however small, if working class people reject a party which will not do anything about employment rights, which is committed to all the Tories' anti-trade union laws, which has collaborated with every vicious attack on our democratic rights, which has made clear that its major priority is the dismantling of state welfare, from housing to education, health to social security.

Indeed, abstentionism in working class areas was a small but positive class response to a party which had not the slightest concern for their interests and that was going to continue in government what its agents in local councils had been doing for years. Supporting Labour was always a class issue: either socialists stood with the middle class intent on defending its privileges, or with the working class that lacked any form of political representation. The majority of the left made their choice and sided with Labour and middle class privilege.

The struggle between these forces will continue to be critical over the next period. With increasing Labour government attacks, the working class has to create once more a movement to defend its interests. Such a movement will emerge in the struggle against casualised slavery, in the fight to defend working class access to adequate education and healthcare, in the resistance to the attack on democratic rights and the destruction of the environment.

Some of the threads that will make up this new movement are already visible: the Liverpool Dockers and their alliance with Reclaim the Streets, the Hillingdon hospital workers, others are reported elsewhere in this issue (see 'Fight poverty pay', p16). Sections of the middle class, in alliance with the Labour Party, will seek to hold it back and to ensure that it does not go beyond the limits of what is acceptable to the ruling class. They will seek to bribe and corrupt the emerging leaders. And where this fails, they will join the government in attempting to criminalise it. The role of socialists and communists will be to prevent this from happening, to provide the ideological and political weapons which can ensure that this new movement extends its influence within the working class rather than become a pawn in the hands of alien class interests. So we welcome the small signs of class division that working class abstentionism represents, for, whatever its current limits, it is a good sign of the future.

## General Election

# How the middle classes voted Labour into power

Labour's landslide victory proved possible because it had managed to persuade a substantial section of the middle class to entrust its interests to a Labour government rather than a fifth Tory administration. By the time Prime Minister Major had called the election, the Tory Party was already close to collapse, completely divided over Europe and hopelessly discredited by sleaze. There could never be any doubt that Labour would win, and do so by a very wide margin. The omens were quite clear: Labour was supported by the *Sun*, the *Financial Times*, the heads of BP, Unilever and other multinationals. After the election, the stock market did not bat an eyelid. In short, Labour had become the party of big business and the banks. On the night of 1 May, Tory MPs toppled like ninepins - wiped out in Scotland and Wales, nine ministers unceremoniously ejected. Which moment was best of all? The sight of a defeated Portillo, his leadership hopes completely crushed? Or that of the odious Hamilton, his hands shaking as he grasped the microphone to whinge at the trouncing he had received from Martin Bell? Or maybe the picture of the tears shed by Kenneth Clarke as he witnessed the electoral destruction of his vicious, reactionary party?

### 1945 and 1997

Many have made a comparison with the Labour landslide of 1945. In 1945, the Tories were also utterly discredited, this time by their association with mass unemployment and the policy of appeasement. Labour's reconstruction programme, based on extensive nationalisation and its willingness to plunder the colonies, was the only credible way for the ruling class to restore its imperialist fortunes. For the middle class, the proposed extension of state welfare relieved them of the significant financial burden of privatised care. As a result, 2 million voted Labour for the first time as swings of 20 per cent in suburban London were recorded. In 1997, the Tories were as universally despised as they were in 1945, whilst the ruling class now found their continued division over Europe completely intolerable. They had got rid of Thatcher in 1990 over this issue, and now they decided they had to get rid of the Tories as a whole.

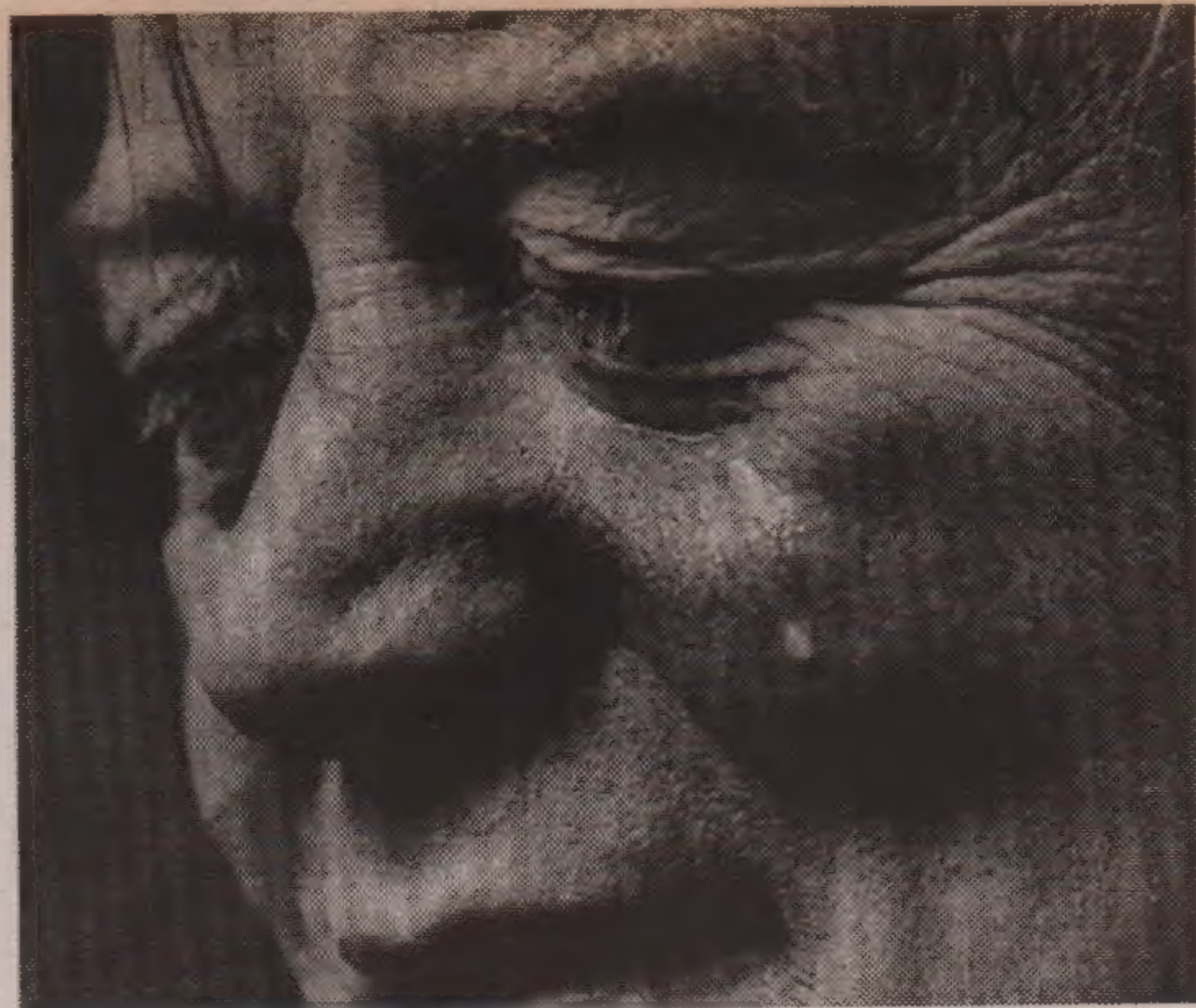
In other respects, however, 1997 is very different in 1945. 50 years ago, Labour nationalised the Bank of England. In 1997, one of its first steps was to end that governmental control and effectively hand it back to the City. 50 years ago, the programme of the Labour Party offered some very material benefits for the working class, not least of all the establishment of the National Health Service, decent education and social security systems, together with a substantial nationalisation pro-

gramme. Labour was able to square the interests of the working class with those of the middle class with the start of the post-war boom. In today's world of intensifying inter-imperialist rivalries, there is no such freedom for manoeuvre. Indeed, it is not even possible to sustain widespread middle class affluence by making the working class pay for it as it was in the 1980s. British capital, concerned only with its profits, just will not afford such largesse, so Labour will be called on to oversee the proletarianisation of a substantial part of this privileged stratum.

### Who voted in 1997, and for whom?

The key voting patterns were as follows:

- Overall turnout, at 71.3 per cent, was substantially lower than in 1992, when it was 77.7 per cent.
- Labour got a total of 13.5 million votes, 44 per cent of the total cast, up 2 million on its 1992 vote. The distribution of the increased votes brought an extra 146 seats, making a total of 419 Labour MPs. Labour's total vote was, however, less than the Tories received in 1992 (14 million). This puts the 'landslide' into perspective.



Goodbye Chancellor Clarke: an architect of vicious anti-working class policies. Chancellor Brown will carry on his mission.

- The Tory party vote fell by a third to 9.6 million. The result was a loss of 178 seats, leaving it with 165 MPs
- In the Six Counties, Sinn Féin won two seats, and narrowly failed to capture a third.
- By social group, the largest swing to Labour at 19 per cent was in group C1 (professional, lower management and clerical), followed by group C2 (skilled manual workers, foremen and the self-employed) at 15 per cent.
- Amongst home owners, the swing to Labour was 11 per cent; amongst trade union members it was seven per cent.
- Where the left stood candidates, they had only limited impact. In only one constituency did they get more than 10 per cent of the vote: Glasgow Pollock where the Socialist Party polled 12 per cent. Elsewhere, three other candidates got more than five per cent (one

Socialist Party candidate in Coventry South, and two Socialist Labour Party candidates, including Scargill at Newport). As against this, three BNP candidates got more than five per cent of the local vote.

Overwhelmingly, the election was a media event mainly of interest to the middle class. In 17 inner-city constituencies, most of which had a substantial black population, turnout was less than 60 per cent; in Liverpool Riverside it was as low as 51.7 per cent. In Harriet Harman's Peckham constituency, it was just over 56 per cent. For nearly half the electorate in these poor working class constituencies, the election was an irrelevancy, and they showed it by refusing to participate.

### Voting by social group

The key to Labour's victory was to maximise middle class support. The lesson of 1992 was well learned. During that election, Labour had proposed to increase the top rate of tax from 40 per cent to 50 per cent and remove the income ceiling on national insurance contributions in order to pay for its minimal spending commitments. This had proved too



Labour's plans for working class London: more police and more repression - tackling 'where and how crime breeds'

cent to 41 per cent, whilst that of the Tories fell from 47 to 35 per cent.

### Voting by geographical area

The biggest swings from the Tories were in London and elsewhere in the southeast. Labour increased its number of seats in London from 32 to 57, and in the rest of the southeast from five to 31. Ten out of the 41 seats in London being defended by the Tories registered swings greater than 17 per cent. Hastings in the southeast went Labour with a swing of 18.5 per cent, Castle Point and Thurrock in Essex by 16.9 and 17.4 per cent respectively. Overall, the swing in London was 13 per cent, and in the remainder of the southeast 12 per cent compared to the national average of 10 per cent. Such figures reflect the higher proportion of C1 and C2 voters in these areas.

### Future government

The election result has destroyed the Tories as a credible political force. They have no MPs in either Scotland or Wales. The ruling class has dismissed them and their farcical leadership election campaign as an irrelevancy. For *Socialist Worker* to claim, as it did just before the election, that 'The Tories remain the party of big business and bosses' shows how out of touch they are with reality. Labour is the party of big capital: the appointment of the head of BP, Sir David Simon, to a ministerial post in the Department of Trade and Industry merely underlines the point. Labour is the only party capable of carrying out imperialism's programme, whether it is in relation to Europe or in destroying state welfare. It may have won on the strength of the middle class vote, but now it will start to turn against this fair-weather support. Blair, Straw, Brown, Harman and Field will have no remorse in making them pay, and through their friends in the 'official labour movement', divide and crush any resistance whether it comes from the working class or any more privileged layer.

Robert Clough



## New Labour at your service

Welcome to the Labour government, Sir David Simon, new minister for trade and competitiveness in Europe and government spokesperson for the Treasury in the House of Lords. Yours has been a busy life of 'service', as Mr Blair might say. Service as the chair of BP – a taxing post, some might think, not to mention (because they don't), running private armies in Algeria and Azerbaijan. Nevertheless, you managed to



Sir David Simon – axed 60,000 jobs at BP – all part of the service

serve simultaneously as a director of Rio Tinto Zinc, Allianz G (Germany's biggest insurance company), as a member of the Court of the Bank of England and adviser to the Deutsche Bank. And now you are to forego the modest stipend of £1.2 million that was your humble reward last year in order to serve the people. Would that we were all so selfless as you, Sir David – or Lord, as we must soon call you. Trevor Rayne

## Health care: a right not a privilege

HANNAH CALLER

Department of Health figures show that Health Authorities in England and Wales faced a deficit of approximately £150 million at the end of March. The director of the National Association of Health Authorities and Trusts announced that this money would have to come out of the £1.2 billion allocated for NHS growth this financial year (1997-98). Despite this extra £1.2 billion promised from the budget, the NHS faces an effective cash cut of over 2.7% this year. By the end of 1996, 75% of all health authorities in Britain were in debt.

In November last year, hospitals were offered an emergency £20 million to avert a crisis, as the £1.2 billion could not be used until the beginning of this financial year, in April. This £20 million was to be used on community support for those people fit to leave hospital but unable to do so with no community care. It is estimated that about 6,000 beds are blocked in England in this way.

Since 1991, 14% of acute beds have been closed in London. In January the King's Fund published a report on mental health provision in London, which showed a service near collapse. The average wait for admission to a secure unit is 24 hours, and to residential accommodation with 24-hour staffing, seven weeks. Since 24-hour community services barely exist, more and more reliance is put on to the voluntary service. In a situation like this, the staff cannot cope, the patients are neglected and the system is dangerous.

East London and City Health Authority (ELCHA) has a projected deficit of £18.4 million by the end of the 1997-98 finan-



With new Labour pleading poverty on behalf of the capitalist class, a two-tier health system will still be the order of the day

cial year. So savings have to be made...

In City and Hackney (one part of ELCHA) they are cutting £528,000 from nursing services, £50,000 from mental health and £278,000 from the frail elderly. Twenty-five voluntary and statutory schemes will be cut to the tune of £750,000. At the Royal London Hospital in east London (part of the Royal Hospital Trust, within ELCHA) £5.5 million will be saved by what is called cost improvement, which in effect means reducing the number of admissions and decreasing the length of stay of those who get in. The list of cuts is almost endless. It is a statutory obligation to enter the financial year with balanced books, we are told, but no statutory obligation, it seems, to provide health care for people.

The difference between what hospital provider trusts in east London and the City say they need, and what ELCHA says it will pay for is £35 million.

Hackney, in east London, has amongst the highest number of homeless people, asylum seekers and refugees in Britain. Whilst they are not counted as part of the total population,

health authority budgets are calculated on population numbers. It is in Hackney that the health advocacy service, vital for the provision of health care to people whose first language is not English, is to be cut by 20%, to realise £424,000 savings. £200,000 of this is to be used to offset the Health Authority overspend.

£216,000 is to be cut from the school health budget in City and Hackney. This means a proposed reduction of school nurses from 17 to 11 and a cut in doctors' sessions. The reduction in staff means that in order to provide an adequate service, some schools may have to lose their health care provision all together. About 20% of children in Hackney are not registered with a GP, and only 60% of Hackney GPs do immunisations, so a school health service is of vital importance. In addition, the health visitor service is being cut, children's services are being decimated and the remaining overstretched staff have their workload increased to breaking point.

Queen Elizabeth Hospital (QEH) for children in Hackney is due to close. The children's

services are due to be relocated to the Royal London Hospital (RLH) and Homerton Hospital. New facilities are not yet built at either of these sites. The Private Finance Initiative, which was to provide money to build the new hospital on the RLH site, has not materialised. The building work will take at least three years, yet QEH is set to close in 1998. The move will save £3 million per year, however the cost of refurbishing the building at the RLH is estimated to cost £3 million. The domestic and portering staff have not been told what will happen to their jobs.

Whilst money-juggling and continual reduction of services continues, the Royal Hospitals Trust (the Royal London, St Bartholomews and the London Chest hospitals) have paid £250,000 to a firm to improve their image. In 1995-96, the Royal Hospital Trust had 107 staff who earned over £50,000 pa, the fourth highest in the country. These examples are not unique, but repeated across the country.

The NHS is being divided and decimated; while, for instance, at Northwick Park and St Mark's Trust, surgeons were told not to operate routinely unless the person comes from a Fund Holding GP or has private insurance, the British Medical Association has been busy ensuring that doctors' pay was high on the agenda at the general election, calling for a 53% rise, so that they may regain their place in the earnings league!

No one in any position of influence appears to have the least regard for patients in the cash-strapped NHS of today, and there is no union or organisation that will support people who fight against the cuts and put their jobs on the line.

New Labour does not promise a new NHS. The working class bears the brunt of the cuts, both as patients and as employees. Communists and socialists and all progressive people have a duty to be part of the organised resistance. Health care is a right, not a privilege. ■

## Ireland: repression intensifies

SARAH BOND

The fact that British armed forces occupy part of Ireland merited barely a mention in the recent election campaign. Were it not for the resourcefulness of the IRA, who succeeded in halting the Grand National and disrupting the transport system causing losses of millions of pounds to business, the issue would have been utterly ignored. Much to the annoyance of the British ruling class, the IRA deprived them of the opportunity to pontificate about the terrorist threat to life and limb because most of the operations involved only hoax bombs.

To their further annoyance, the nationalist people of the north of Ireland elected two Sinn Féin MPs, Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness, ousting from West Belfast Joe Hendron of the SDLP – the party the British government has tried so hard to nurture as the acceptable face of nationalism. Sinn Féin's share

of the vote increased to 16%. This compares quite favourably with, say, the Liberal Democrats share of the vote in England which was 18%.

Yet while the media bored us all with news of that great exercise in democracy, the general election, in the north of Ireland nationalists were experiencing the reality of bourgeois democracy for the oppressed. To give a sample of the campaign of violence to which the nationalist community has been subjected, here are some of the incidents that occurred on just one night – 26 April, the Saturday before the election.

- 13-year-old Gavin McKenna was shot in the head with a plastic bullet by a British soldier at almost point-blank range. Gavin said the soldier laughed as he fired his gun. Doctors are unsure whether he will regain sight in his right eye, because of damage to the optical nerve.

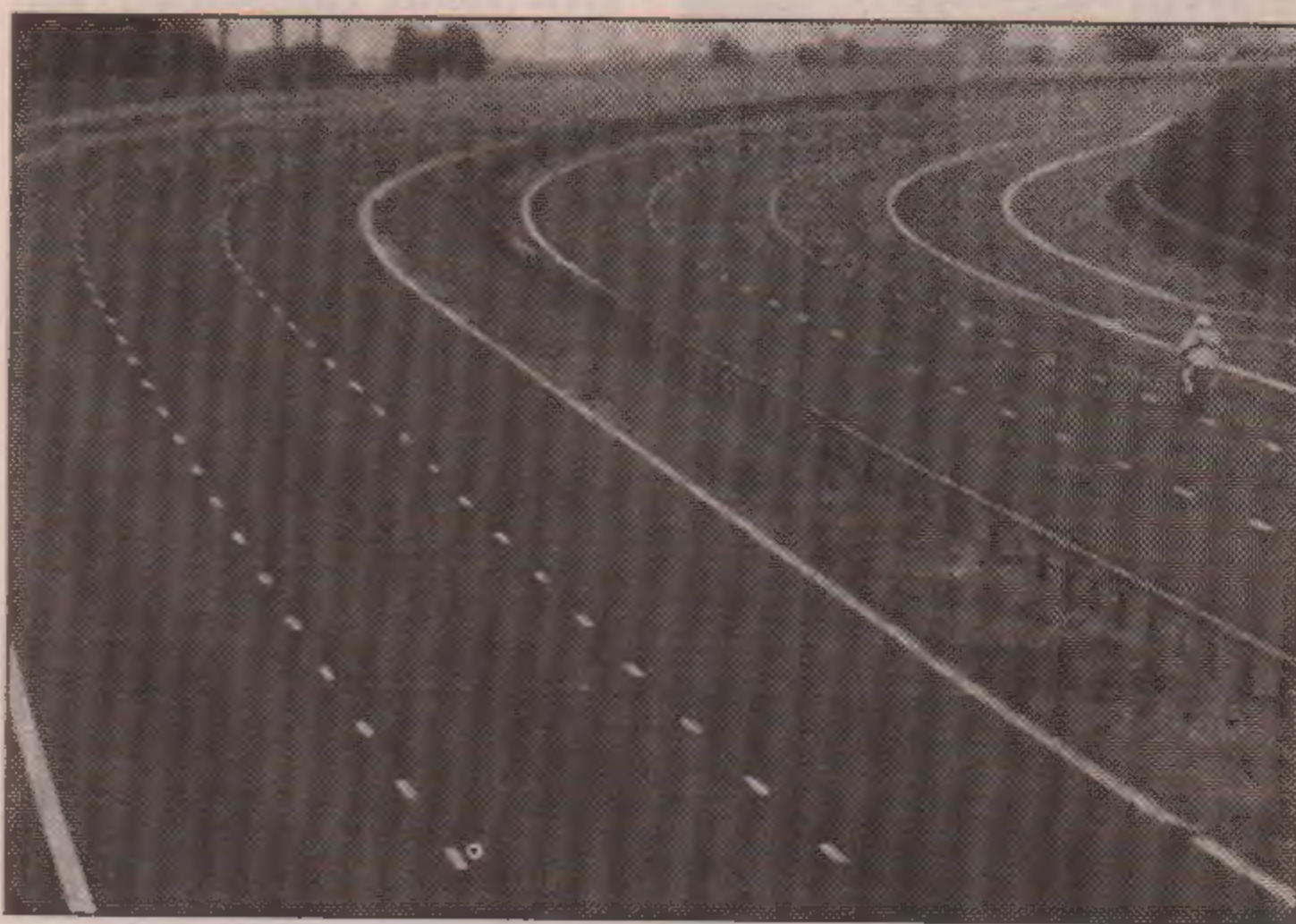
- A Portadown Catholic was attacked by a gang of 30 loyalists and died on 9 May. His

friend, who was beaten unconscious, says that RUC men were sitting across the road but 'did nothing'.

- John McLaughlin had his arm broken by RUC and RIR (Royal Irish Regiment, formerly Ulster Defence Regiment) men after he tried to help local nationalists being harassed by the RUC/RIR. The soldiers had shouted, 'This is the UVF on patrol', verbally abused and assaulted one of the women, and then attacked one of the men.

- Loyalists gutted parts of St Nicholas's Catholic Church in County Antrim in an arson attack – one of many destroyed in the recent period.

There have been many other incidents – repeated attempted bombings of Sinn Féin offices, assaults of nationalists by British soldiers, RUC and loyalist terror gangs, routine stopping and searching of Sinn Féin activists by the RUC/British army. Will such violence disqualify the political wing of the British army, the British government, from the next meeting of



Reclaiming the streets: the IRA kept Ireland on the election agenda

the 'peace' talks on 3 June? There are parties included in the talks, the Ulster Democratic Party and the Progressive Unionist Party, with open links to the loyalist death squads. Will the arson attacks, attempted bombings and beatings mean their exclusion? Of course not. It is only the violence of the oppressed that our rulers, Labour or Tory, condemn. Terror and brute force has long been their key weapon in the suppression of opposition to their occupation of the north of Ireland. So the new Northern Ireland Secretary, Mo Mowlam,

has ruled out Sinn Féin's participation on 3 June and politicians with nationalist blood on their hands will sit down to discuss how best to isolate and neutralise the revolutionary nationalism of the Catholic working class. Meanwhile away from the talks, in the nationalist areas of the sectarian statelet, the struggle for a true and lasting peace – for the withdrawal of British troops and an end to the partition of Ireland – will continue. Democratic and progressive forces here in Britain must give this struggle their unconditional support. ■

## What we stand for

The Revolutionary Communist Group fights for a society which produces for people's needs, not profit – that is, a socialist society.

Capitalist society is based on the exploitation of the working class by the ruling capitalist class, for profit. Internationally, imperialism divides the world into oppressed and oppressor nations: the majority lives in poverty, while a tiny minority squanders unprecedented wealth. By restricting production worldwide to the narrow limits of profit-making, the basic needs of the majority of humanity cannot be fulfilled.

► In Britain today more than four million are unemployed with many people – women in particular – trapped in low wage, part-time jobs. 25% of the population – the majority women and children – lives in poverty, with lower wages, lower benefit and fewer social services. Meanwhile, money-grabbers in the newly-privatised industries (like the water authorities) and banks amass more profits and pay their directors inflated salaries. *The RCG supports the struggle of the working class to defend and improve its living standards.*

► Racist attacks are on the increase. The police do nothing to defend black people against attack, and instead blame black people for crime. At the same time, Britain's racist immigration laws are used to harass, detain and deport black people. *The RCG fights against racism and fascism in all its forms. We support the right of black people to organise and defend themselves against racist attack. We oppose all immigration laws.*

► While the working class bears the brunt of the crisis, new laws like the Criminal Justice Act have been introduced to criminalise the right to protest. *The RCG opposes the Criminal Justice Act and fights to defend democratic rights – the right to organise and protest.*

► The richest 20% of the world's population consumes 83% of its wealth and resources. It is the capitalist system which consigns billions to poverty. Internationally, oppressed nations are driven into poverty and debt by imperialism as multinationals extort superprofits from the labour of the poor. Throughout Asia, Africa and eastern Europe the effects of the free market are obvious – low wages, appalling work conditions, poverty and starvation for the mass of the people; environmental degradation, corruption and repression in government. *The RCG supports the struggle of all oppressed people against imperialism.*

► The RCG supports socialist Cuba and condemns the illegal US blockade. *We fight actively in defence of the Cuban revolution.*

► In the drive for profits, the needs of human beings and the environment are secondary to the profits of multinational companies. *The RCG supports the struggle to defend the environment.*

► Who will defend the interests of the working class? In Britain, it is clear the Tories have defended only the rich and corrupt – but the Labour Government won't defend the working class either. It has approved many anti-working class laws, including the Criminal Justice Act. The Labour Party is a ruling class party which defends capitalism. *The RCG fights for the independent interests of the whole working class. We do not support any of the pro-capitalist parties in elections.*

► The RCG fights against prejudice and bigotry, which are used by the ruling class to divide and weaken the working class. *We oppose all discrimination against black people, women, lesbians, gay men and people with disabilities.*

The defence of the working class and oppressed can only come from the working class organising democratically and independently in its own interests, in Britain and internationally.

*The Revolutionary Communist Group stands for the rebirth of a socialist movement internationally to destroy capitalism and imperialism and replace them with a socialist society, organised to defend the interests of the working class and oppressed. Join us.*

*Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism*  
BCM Box 5909, London WC1N 3XX  
Telephone: 0171 837 1688



## Fight racism! Fight deportations!

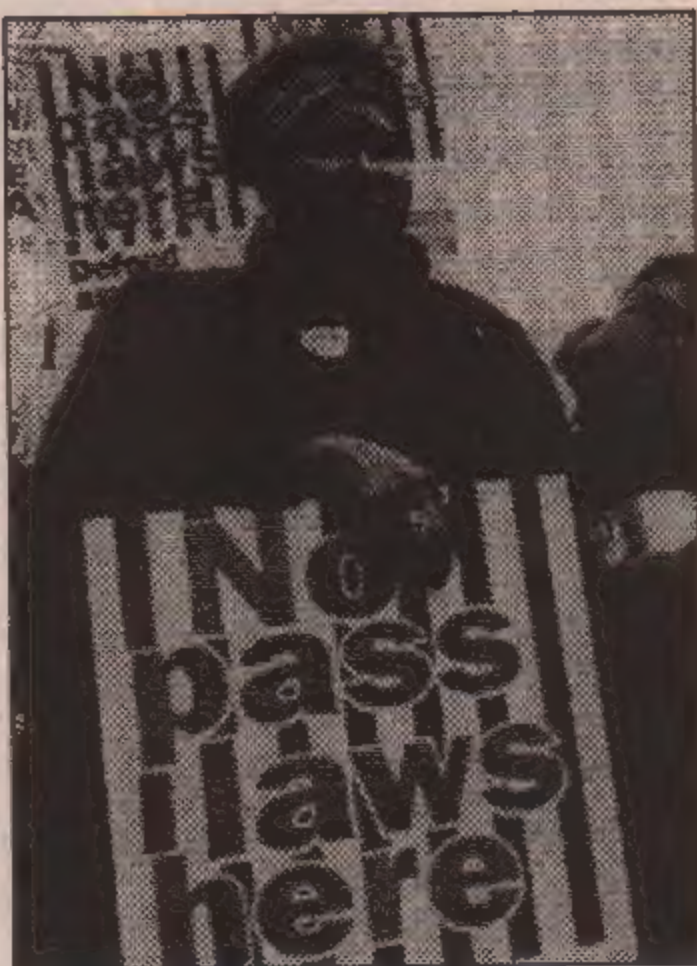
### Mass deportation during election

While all eyes were on the election, the Home Office Immigration and Nationality department has been working overtime to 'resolve' over 12,000 outstanding asylum cases. On the day of the election *The Independent* quoted a senior Home Office official, who declared their project 'remarkably successful' and claimed that 600 cases had been decided in the previous three weeks. Many of these will result in 'enforcement actions', the current euphemism for deportation.

A 25-strong task-force began work under the auspices of the 'Asylum Arrears Implementation Project' on 'clearing the backlog' on 7 April, the day before Parliament was dissolved. The same official told *The Independent* that the scheme was devised in January but, 'It was very convenient that it was set up at a time when no MPs were available to defend constituents.'

### The Sans Papiers

The Parisian 'Sans Papiers' (literally 'without papers') - undocumented immigrants and refugees campaigning for legal status - gained international attention last August when 300 Africans were violently expelled by 1,500 riot police from the church they had occupied for two months. Their struggle has inspired others and 24 Sans Papiers collectives have formed across France. In Italy 60 immigrants occupied a Milan church and in the Netherlands Iranians and Tamils have led hunger-



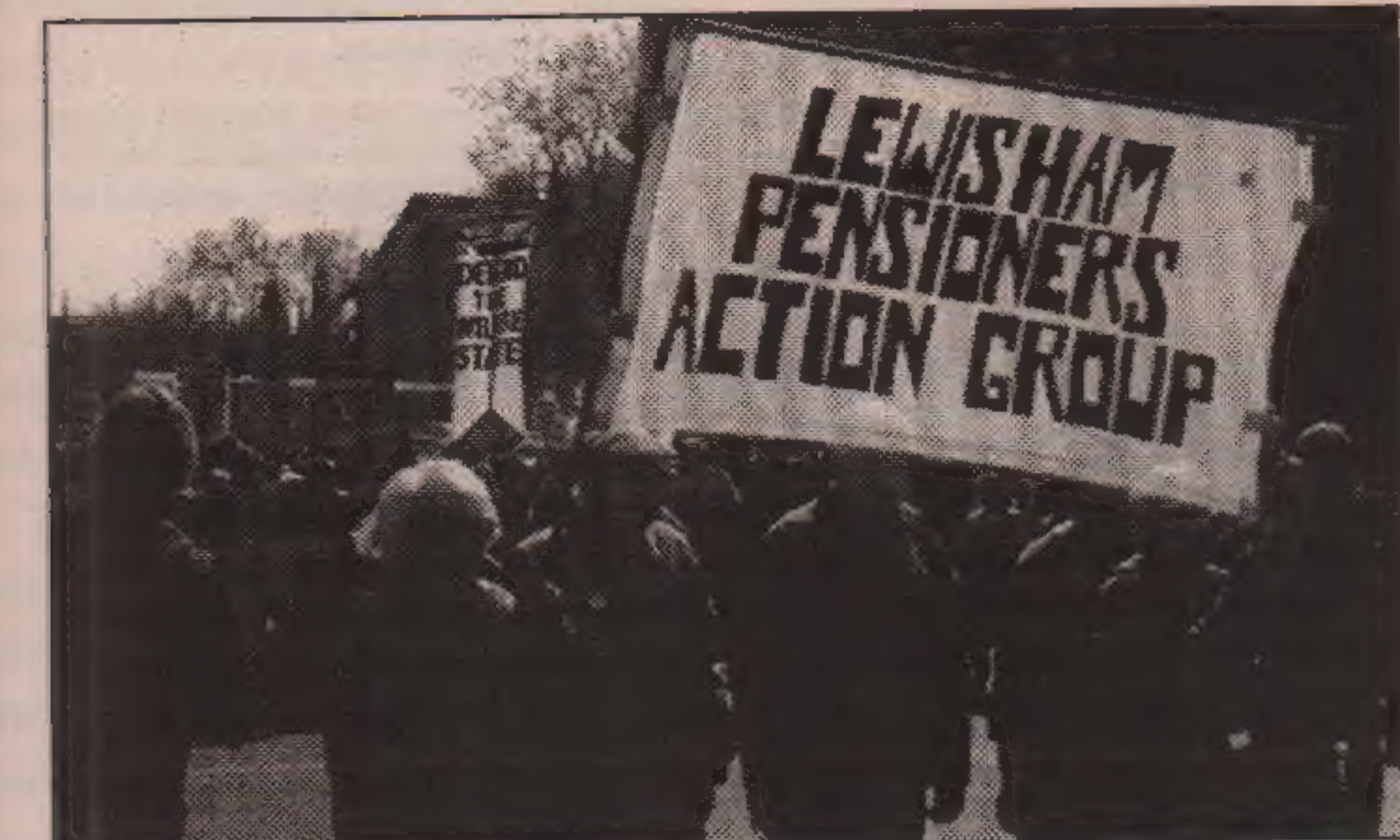
strikes in detention centres. A Europe-wide meeting is planned for June. For more information on the struggle of the Sans Papiers, contact Crossroads Women's Centre, 230a Kentish Town Rd, London NW5, tel 0171 482 2496, or access the Sans Papiers multilingual website at <http://bok.net/pajol>.

### Hunger strike in Winson Green

On 5 May, 15 asylum seekers went on hunger strike against internment in Winson Green prison. They are being held in the punishment block which is infested with cockroaches and other pests and are locked up 24 hours a day, except for one hour's association and one shower per week. There was a large picket on 10 May and there will be pickets every Saturday from 2-3pm while the hunger strike continues. Further information from NCADC, 22 Berners Street, Birmingham B19 2DR, tel: 0121 554 6947.

Nicki Jameson

## Pensioners' notes



Lewisham pensioners lead the dockers' march

RENE WALLER

As readers of FRFI know, the pensioners' movement sustained a heavy blow by the death last December of Les Stannard, but I'm glad to report that most of his friends and colleagues realised that the best tribute they could make was to redouble their efforts. That's what has been done. Our collection of signatures for a better basic pension and no discrimination on account of age when requiring admission to hospital has continued unabated.

We have neither ignored other issues nor confined our efforts to pensioners' struggles but gave support to the dockers' march for social justice, and this was acknowledged by a request that we lead the whole march down Whitehall, which we were proud to do.

Recently Lewisham pensioners' action group has also campaigned in support of Lewisham Hospital. The hospital suggested we bring our banner inside where it was warmer but of course we wanted our support to be seen and noted - and so it was, I'm glad to say, for we are determined to merit our name of 'action' group.

Our regular meetings continue to be well attended. Whilst the town hall is closed for redecoration we are meeting at the St Lawrence Centre, Bromley Rd, Catford.

For us polling day was just a beginning - we are fighting for a decent pension. If we are to gain anything it will be because of the pressure we exert. We must ensure it's too great to be ignored. More than ever before, we cannot afford to relax. Let us never forget we are many and they are few, so we can win. ■

HELEN

On 12 April 20,000 protesters, united under the banners 'Support the Liverpool dockers' and 'Never mind the ballots, reclaim the streets', marched through London to demand the reinstatement of the Liverpool dockers betrayed by the TGWU and Labour Party. Dockers, Reclaim the Streets (RTS), communists, socialists, anarchists and other activists united to express disgust at the consensus of the parliamentary parties preparing the election. Marchers gathered in Kennington Park where there were speeches from people, including Steve, a representative from Rock around the Blockade. He applauded the unity of the day not just with those in struggle in Britain but also internationally against capitalism.

Despite media attempts to depoliticise the event, the message was clear: 'Don't vote, organise!' Along the march police blocked 'wrong turnings' leading to the offices of power. A couple of protesters did manage to gatecrash, through the windows of the Foreign Office, and documents were thrown out to the gutter. A red flare sent police scrambling for their helmets. Protesters scaled the Cenotaph and dragged down the Union Jack. The police reacted by horse-charging the marchers, thrashing out with truncheons extended.

As the rally in Trafalgar Square drew to an end, the van carrying a reserve RTS sound system got through police lines (the original equipment having been abducted by the police). A

## Dockers march for justice



Demonstrators take over the streets to demand justice

party began as bass pumped out and the sun shone. A huge banner was hung from the roof of Canada House - 'Reclaim your environment' - and soon others appeared: 'If I can't dance, it's not my revolution', 'They wanna fight, we wanna dance'. The naivety of this slogan was shown several hours later.

The police cordoned off the square and refused people access. By 7.30pm ravers looked up in horror to see riot police charging at them. The driver and two passengers with the sound system which had crossed police lines were arrested and charged with attempted

murder. These charges were dropped by the next day. A policeman told us it was too late to leave peacefully, we had 'missed our chance'. People were chased down to the Embankment and over bridges.

There were many young people on the demonstration, new to the idea of collective mass and direct action. It was an inspiring day, with the energy of so many people using their political power constructively.

There are, however, lessons to be learned. All protesters must understand the importance of defending demonstrations from police attack. We can

only defend ourselves if we all take responsibility and remain united. It was only a small-scale battle involving a minority of demonstrators which kept police at a distance from the party allowing a good 3,000 people to dance on, oblivious to the rising tension and aggressive police activity.

Despite its weaknesses, the demonstration had a positive effect on many participants. Elly, a student taking part in her first demonstration, told us that it had 'moved me from a feeling of despondency to a feeling of hope. The atmosphere was buzzing.' ■

## Free Roisin McAliskey

NICKI JAMESON

Roisin McAliskey has been in prison in Britain awaiting extradition to Germany since November 1996. Roisin is the 22-year-old daughter of Irish civil rights campaigner and one time MP Bernadette McAliskey (previously Devlin) and is due to face charges of participating in an IRA attack on the British Army barracks at Osnabruck on 28 June 1996.

Roisin is heavily pregnant and is being kept in solitary confinement in Holloway. Not surprisingly, her physical state of health is extremely poor: in April she had to be taken to court in a wheelchair because she had a high risk of thrombosis and one of her legs was so swollen that she could not stand; there were also fears about the baby's health.

All bail applications have been rejected outright on the grounds that Roisin is a high security risk; offers of over £150,000 in sureties and an English address at which she would agree to reside while awaiting the outcome of the extradition hearing have been ignored.

The 'evidence' against Roisin is minimal. The only witness who had supposedly identified her to the German police subsequently went on television and publicly retracted his identification. Other witnesses, who had more contact with the supposed sus-

pects, almost entirely ruled Roisin out. The German court is therefore relying entirely on two fingerprints found on a scrap of silver paper, apparently from a cigarette packet, which was ostensibly left behind by the suspects - not even at the barracks but in the grounds of the house they were thought to have stayed in, which makes the link even more tenuous.

Roisin McAliskey is being subjected to the combined worst of what the British prison system has to offer pregnant women - indignity, medical neglect and the prospect of birth in chains - and political prisoners - solitary confinement, closed visits (these took place while she was labelled High Risk Category A; she has now been reclassified as an 'ordinary' Cat A prisoner), repeated searches and a myriad of other petty 'security' restrictions. Like Kurdish prisoner Kani Yilmaz, who has been in British gaols since October 1994 and is also fighting extradition to Germany, Roisin has committed no crime in Britain and will very likely be acquitted if and when she finally comes to trial in Germany.

Further information on the campaign for Roisin McAliskey is available from Fúascailt Irish Political Prisoners Campaign, PO Box 3923, London NW5 1RA; telephone 0181 985 8250. Messages of support can be sent to Roisin McAliskey TG2456, HMP Holloway, Parkhurst Road, London, N7 ONU. ■

## Shell: oil imperialism in Nigeria

PAUL ABBEY

The government of Nigeria rules by fear; it does as it wishes with no accountability. This impunity and the drive for personal aggrandisement, together with its lack of vision, has led to the country's present state of chaos and penury. This state of affairs seems an incomprehensible paradox as the country produces two million barrels of oil a day, but is listed as one of the poorest countries in the world.

Oil accounts for over 96% of Nigeria's revenue and extraction is controlled by transnational companies. These transnationals use this lack of democracy to create laws to maximise their profits. The biggest culprit is the Anglo-Dutch company Shell, which extracts about 50% of Nigeria's oil exports. In the pursuit of profit, Shell breaches international codes of practice - including a commitment to the environment.

The company has wreaked environmental disaster in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. There are numerous oil spills due to the use of outdated equipment. Between 1986 and 1988, Shell oil spills in Nigeria totalled more than 40% of the company's oil spills worldwide. For 40 years, Shell has flared the gaseous by-products of the mining process, which spews out dangerous greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, resulting

in acid rain. The net effect of these practices is that the people of the Niger Delta have had their livelihood of farming and fishing destroyed. The once-rich land is now barren and there are no longer any fish. In addition, no compensation is paid to the farmers - unlike Shell's practice in Europe and North America. The company does not even pay royalties to the landowners and does not carry out any Environmental Impact Assessment.

Shell is aware of the consequences of its operation, but has done nothing to change its practices; it has the support of the Nigerian dictatorship. Any protest is suppressed by the Nigerian security forces. Everyone remembers the murder of Ken Saro-Wiwa along with eight others for opposing Shell's operations in Ogoniland. The result of that protest is that Ogoniland is now a military zone with hundreds of thousands of Ogonis displaced as refugees.

Shell would stop its racist practice in Nigeria only if its profits were threatened. One way to achieve this is through a consumer boycott of its products. The Nigerian Organisation for Democracy with Integrity and Common Ground holds a regular picket outside the Shell garage, Walworth Road, south London, on the first Saturday of every month. If you want to stop Shell, join us - or organise your own picket on the first Saturday of every month. ■



## abc of destruction

**G**is for genetic engineering: Imperialism's new biological playground. Genetic engineering, or genetic modification, is used to transfer genetic material from one species to another, permanently changing a species into a new form. Like every other aspect of our lives, this irreversible process is taking place under the direct control of giant multinational corporations, to serve the narrow interests of capital. It is estimated that genetically engineered soya and maize are currently being used in over 60% of the processed food products in our shops, such as bread, margarine, cornflakes and baby food. They are also fed in an unprocessed form to animals and fish destined for human consumption.

The new modified soya, 'RoundUp Ready', is produced by Monsanto, the US agri-chemical giant more famous for NutraSweet, Astroturf and Agent Orange, as well as numerous dioxins and the genetically engineered BGH (Bovine Growth Hormone). Coincidentally, Monsanto also manufactures 'RoundUp', the world's largest selling chemical herbicide, which provides 40% of the company's operating profit. 'RoundUp Ready' soya has been specifically modified... to be resistant to 'RoundUp' herbicide! Unfortunately the soil it grows in, the water which runs off it and the other species which consume it are not so resistant. Perhaps we should ask for some modification ourselves before that next bowl of cornflakes. In April activists occupied Monsanto headquarters in England and Australia. Direct Action continues in London every Saturday. Meet at 12pm, WH Smith's, Victoria Tube.

**H**is for Health: Considering capitalism's ceaseless assault on most other species, one could be forgiven for thinking that at least humanity might be benefitting from it all. Given the current level of medical understanding could we at least expect to live in a world where diarrhoea wasn't the seventh biggest killer disease? No. Two and a half million people die every year, most of them children dying because the water supply is contaminated. Cancer in all its forms kills over six million and coronary heart disease over seven. Four decades after the development of an effective vaccine, about 90,000 children are crippled each year by polio. And as our level of medical knowledge over the next 25 years improves... the World Health Organisation predicts that lung cancers in women will rise 33%, prostate cancers in men 40%, and cases of diabetes will more than double. Perhaps we should stop eating hamburgers? It is argued that imperialism sells disease, spreads disease and makes a fortune selling drugs that don't even cure disease. Consider Hoechst, the \$21,747.5m pharmaceutical giant, but one of the leading releasers in the USA of known or suspected carcinogens in 1989. Hoechst's Dipyron, banned or severely restricted in developed countries because of the risk of lethal side effects, made the company a fortune in Thailand, Africa, the Philippines and India, where it was marketed for the flu, spasms, rheumatism and fever respectively.

**I**s for Imperial Chemical Industries: 'ICI fully supports the principle of sustainability' - Charles Miller Smith, Chief Executive. ICI is to sell off its chlorine, polyester, fertiliser and explosives operations. It has also become the first corporate sponsor of rare species of butterflies in Britain. Could it be that the one-time biggest polluter of the North Sea and apartheid teargas manufacturer has decided to save the environment? Watch this space!

## McLibel: corporate crimes on trial

STEVE BYRNE

**Whatever decision Mr Justice Bell finally arrives at, it is clear that the 'McLibel Trial', which ends this summer, has been a spectacular blow to McDonald's global strategy of propaganda and censorship.**

The trial, brought by the \$30 billion-a-year corporation against London Greenpeace members Helen Steel and Dave Morris, has been a resounding success for all critics of the food industry and of multinational corporations in general. Transcripts of the entire case (about 19,000 pages so far) are now available to the public, as well as a book by *Guardian* journalist John Vidal. A reconstruction drama and TV documentary will be completed shortly. Over two million copies of the leaflet, 'What's wrong with McDonald's?', which the trial aimed to suppress, have been handed out since the action started, and protests and campaigns against McDonald's continue to grow in over 24 countries: from Australia where residents stopped a new store from opening; to Bermuda where the House of Assembly is considering a bill which will ban all fast food stores; to the US where sales are declining despite \$200m promotion of new products. The internet site 'McSpotlight', which makes available across the globe 10,000 separate files containing everything McDonald's doesn't want the public to know, has been accessed almost 9 million times since its launch in February 1996. And, in addition to numerous protests



It's OK kids, we don't do nutrition...

throughout the trial, an international Victory Day is planned for the Saturday after Mr Bell finally reaches his verdict (the issues were deemed 'too complicated' to allow the defendants a trial by jury). 384 of 750 UK stores have already been 'adopted' by local activists. FRFI supporters will be picketing the Seven Sisters' Road branch in north London and branches in other parts of the country. Leave a contact number on 0171 837 1688 to join us.

The Corporation spends \$2 billion each year on advertising

and promotions - our trial has shown the huge contrast between their glossy image and the reality. Whatever the verdict, the need to scrutinise and challenge multinationals has never been greater.' (McLibel defendants)

### The case continues

If the verdict goes against them, the defendants intend to appeal, and then, if necessary, take the British Government to the European Court of Human Rights. They have submitted that English libel law is oppres-

sive and unfair, that multinational corporations should not be able to use libel laws against their critics. They have also submitted that the McLibel case was an abuse of procedure and of public rights, particularly the denial of legal aid and a jury trial, that it was beyond all precedent, and that there was 'an overriding imperative for decisions to be made to protect the public interest'. Outrageously, McDonald's has asked the Judge to order the defendants (total joint income less than £7,500 pa) to pay £80,000-£120,000 damages if it wins the case. This is despite repeated claims that 'it has never been [McDonald's] intention to seek damages'. Paul Preston, their UK President was confronted with the untrue press releases to this effect. He was asked, 'But you are not concerned enough to actually do something to stop the dissemination of false information by McDonald's?', to which he replied 'Not at present, no'. To this day the company continues to distribute these inaccurate press releases. In their counterclaim, the defendants are seeking damages for libel in the press releases and the 300,000 defamatory leaflets produced by the company. If damages are awarded against them, Steel and Morris also intend to sue the three private investigators who were hired by McDonald's to spy on them. In addition to all this, the defendants are urging all UK McDonald's employees who worked overtime before 1992 to seek advice, to write to the company demanding payment, or to sue the company. This follows the revelation in court that 'for some workers, at some times, their overall pay... was less than their statutory entitlement'. One former worker has already begun proceedings.

McLibel Support Campaign: 0171 713 1269  
McSpotlight Website: <http://www.mcspotlight.org/> - 'the final nail in the coffin of McDonald's global censorship strategy.'

### McLibel highlights

**Rainforests:** McDonald's are still obtaining beef for their stores in Brazil from ranches situated on recently-cleared rainforest land (testimony of experts Branford and Hecht based on facts supplied by McDonald's suppliers in Brazil).  
**Litter:** McDonald's witness, the Director-General of the Tidy Britain Group, admitted that McDonald's were in the top '1 or 2% of companies' whose products end up as litter.  
**Packaging:** McDonald's admitted that the polystyrene packaging collected during a nationally-publicised UK scheme 'for recycling into such things as plant pots' was in fact 'dumped' (testimony of Ed Oakley, Vice President of McDonald's UK).  
**Nutrition:** a McDonald's internal memo (1986) was read out: 'We can't really address or defend nutrition. We don't sell nutrition and people don't come to McDonald's for nutrition'.  
**Food safety:** McDonald's have admitted that they were responsible for an outbreak of E-coli 0157 food poisoning in the USA in 1982, and in Preston (UK) in 1991, in which people suffered serious kidney failure.  
**Employment rights:** two dozen ex-McDonald's workers testified about the poor pay and conditions; trade unionists from around the world gave evidence about organising in the face of McDonald's hostility to trade unions. McDonald's admitted having paid some UK staff under the statutory minimum and that employees 'would not be allowed to carry out any overt union activity on McDonald's premises'.

## Bougainville: the jewel in RTZ's crown

STEVE BYRNE

**'When injustice becomes law, resistance is justified and becomes a duty... Confronted with state injustice and the power of the multi-nationals with their aggressive development policies, and in the absence of any acceptable solutions to their grievances, Bougainvilleans had no other option but to mobilise and face the "aggressor" head on.'** *Moses and Rikha Havini, representatives of the Bougainville Interim Government*

According to the British media, it seemed that Papua New Guinea (PNG) was plunged into a political and social crisis in March over the decision to hire British mercenaries to quell a 'secessionist revolt' on a nearby island. Four cabinet ministers quit, the commander of the defence force was dismissed, soldiers held mercenaries captive and an uprising in the capital, Port Moresby, spread across the island as the people and the army demanded that the Prime Minister resign. It seemed as though somewhere a journalist had missed out a rather important chunk of history - the 'Jewel in the Crown' of environmental resistance -

the continuing war of the Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA) against multinational mining interests.

Bougainville is part of the Solomon Islands archipelago. It is the biggest island lying in the north of the Solomon Islands chain and is a mere 8km from their sea border. However, after a history of colonial bartering, mainly between Britain and Germany, it was placed under the control of Port Moresby, some 900 km away.

The matrilineal society of the island was disturbed when, in 1964, a geologist working for Conzinc Rio Tinto of Australia Exploration Ltd (CRA) - one of many masks worn by the British multinational Rio Tinto Zinc (see FRFI 116 & 117) - discovered rich copper deposits in Panguna at the heart of the island. Soon Bougainville Copper Ltd (BCL: 65.6% CRA, 28% North Broken Hill Holdings, of which RTZ held 80.7% and 53% respectively) began to devastate the island. Panguna became the biggest open-cast mine in the world, a crater half a kilometre deep and nearly seven kilometres in circumference. In 20 years it was to become one of the worst human-made environmental catastrophes. In 1972 production began: from 1973 to

1983, 768 million tonnes of ore and waste were processed, rich in copper and iron pyrites. Of the 373 million tonnes of processed ore, under 7 million tonnes was exported, and the remainder dumped in the Jaba valley. By 1976, out of 118 million tonnes of waste rock and 108 million tonnes of tailings which spewed out of Panguna, around a third was 'smeared over the valley floor and neighbouring areas' causing 'serious environmental change'. Observers ranging from scientists to Australian business journalists have described what they saw: 'All aquatic life in the Jaba Valley has been killed'; 'Crops grow only after heavy application of artificial fertiliser to the highly acidic soil'; 'Rio Tinto Zinc has more to answer for in this tiny corner of the globe than any other.' In 1988 Perpetua Serero, leader of the island's landowners, told a reporter: 'We don't grow healthy crops any more... we have become mere spectators as our earth is being dug up, taken away and sold for millions'.

In 1969 BCL began construction of a port in the coastal region of Rorovana. A delegation of 25 villagers met BCL, who were accompanied by the District Commissioner and 100

armed police. As soon as the police moved forward, 600 more villagers materialised from the jungle undergrowth, scored a temporary victory over BCL, and set the scene for 28 years of resistance against what is now the largest mining corporation in the world.

Until 1988 opposition to the mine was characterised by non-violent direct action and legal and political negotiations for proper compensation. By November 1988 the islanders' patience was waning. A hundred farmers blockaded the roads with heavy machinery. Another group, led by Francis Ona, stole explosives and walkie-talkies from the company stores, burned BCL buildings and a helicopter and destroyed vital communications and electricity installations. The following month production was halted as transmission lines were bombed, BCL and CRA shares fell dramatically and trading closed until further notice.

Within a year the war on Bougainville was being fought in earnest. Australia supplied the PNG defence forces with four Iroquois helicopters (for 'non-military purposes' but kitted out with machine guns), and the BRA was formed, armed initially with guns made from coconut shell and water piping. Pitted against Australian trained, paid and equipped troops, and the subject of a murderous blockade of medicine, clothing, food and fuel, the BRA remains

undefeated to this day. They have control of around 30% of the island including the mine itself. They have the support of around 100,000 people, not least because of the guerillas' policy of working two days a week on the land with the local people.

It was against this revolution that the PNG government (which held a 20% stake in the mine, accounting for almost 45% of PNG's total export earnings by 1988) decided to bring in Sandline International, who in turn employed Executive Outcomes, two South African mercenary firms with murdering experience in Northern Ireland, Sierra Leone, Angola and elsewhere. There is direct shareholder control between the two and a suspected indirect link with RTZ through a Robert Freedland, who owns shares in Executive Outcomes and Diamondwork, a company associated with other CRA/RTZ projects. Fortunately the PNG troops, angry at pay and conditions, blocked the mercenaries from honouring their contract, and the mine remains closed to this day.

'The mine will remain closed for the rest of our lives' *Declaration of the Panguna Landowners, 1992.*

Victory to the Bougainville Revolutionary Army!

\*This term was originally used to describe the Panguna mine itself, by Sir Val Duncan, RTZ's first chairman.



# Turkey's silent coup

ELIF MUTLUAY

Near the end of April, Turkey's National Security Council (NSC) consisting of military generals, the President, the Prime Minister and a few ministers, gave a 'briefing' to prominent journalists, businessmen and trade union leaders. They explained to their elite audience that the military had radically shifted its defence strategy. From now on, the 'internal threat' would be considered the primary strategic threat. According to the NSC, the external threat had greatly diminished with the end of the cold war, and problems with Greece could be solved within the framework of EU application and membership.

What were the main components of the 'internal threat'? Islamic fundamentalists, Kurdish separatists and left-wing terrorists, of course.

Over the course of the last several months, the Turkish military has been slowly and 'gently' taking over the country. This article reviews this unofficial military takeover and its consequences.

## Low-intensity democracies

Over the last 10 years, people around the world have become familiar with the phenomenon of military rule giving way to nominally civilian democratic governments without however any interruption in the dirty wars and police-state repression tactics. Most of Latin America is now in this state. In spite of efforts by European governments to pretend that Turkey is

now a democratic, if imperfect, government, Turkey was one of the first countries in which this model was tried out. After the military coup in 1980, and the ensuing brutal repression of the left, a civilian facade for the government was quickly constructed, while leaving the military as the final authority. Over the years, the extent of overt military interference has varied, with the general trend being to keep the military's role as much behind the scenes as possible. In the last several months, however, the situation has radically changed.

On 3 November last year, an automobile accident near the town of Susurluk set in motion a chain of events which led to public exposure of part of Turkey's 'state within a state' – the illegal paramilitary organisation through which the Turkish military and state terrorised and murdered a great deal of its opposition. This has been covered in more detail in previous issues of FRFI. After lying low for a number of months in order to let the public furore die down, the military finally reared its head in relation to an entirely different issue.

On 3 February, the army sent tanks rolling through Sincan, ostensibly as part of normal military exercises. In reality, however, it was a clear and open response to a festival held in the town the day before, where local Welfare Party officials hosted the Iranian ambassador to Turkey for a night of denunciation of Israel. The Welfare Party, now in a ruling coalition with the True Path Party, has been attempting to foster a

mildly Islamic cultural agenda, which included more ties with Islamic countries, including Iran. Such moves have been met with disapproval by the US, since they have been trying to isolate Iran as part of their 'dual containment' policy.

The next salvo fired by the military was the visit of Deputy Chief of Staff Cevik Bir to the United States. In the course of his visit, Cevik Bir made open statements to the press in which he denounced Iran as a terrorist state and said the military would not allow fundamentalism to threaten the principles on which the Turkish state was founded. In addition to the implication that Welfare had better watch its step, the move was designed to give a clear indication to the US that the military would not allow any deals with a country that was blacklisted by the US.

The culmination of the military's efforts came soon after with the 28 February meeting of the NSC, which issued several ultimatums to the government. The one that has most caught the public (and media) eye, and has become a rallying point for both proponents and opponents of the NSC directives, is the introduction of an eight-year compulsory education period, in contrast to the current effective requirement of five years. This directive would have the effect of shutting down the entire state-supported system of religious junior high schools designed to last only five years.

## All bourgeois forces line up behind the NSC

As a result of this directive an artificial 'secular/anti-secular'

TABLE 1:  
Wage distribution – 1994 State  
Institute of Statistics Household  
Survey

Population stratum	Percentage share in the national income
Top 20%	54.9
Second 20%	19.0
Third 20%	12.6
Fourth 20%	8.6
Bottom 20%	4.9

Source: State Institute of Statistics, 1996

TABLE 2: Human rights situation in Turkey – 1996

Summary executions, deaths in custody	179
Deaths in shoot-outs	2,750
Extrajudicial killings	70
'Disappeared' in custody	170
Torture claims	325
Detentions	19,224
Villages bombed (Kurdish areas)	100
Unions and newspapers banned	117
Unions and newspapers raided by police	127
TV and radio stations closed down	55
Imprisoned journalists/authors	140

Source: Human Rights Association

agenda has been adopted completely by all bourgeois forces. People ranging from leaders of political parties to prominent supreme court judges started issuing statements against religious fundamentalism. Tanis Ciller, the Deputy Prime Minister, neatly followed on from a position where she was doing her best to be filmed wearing the Islamic headscarf and appearing devoutly religious to stirring speeches calling the military the conscience of the nation and the

guardian of Ataturk's principles. Although religious fundamentalism is a very reactionary current that must be fought against, it is nowhere near as strong as the NSC journalists and politicians make it out to be.

The shift in the agenda is a deliberate attempt to divert attention from the state gangs exposed in the Susurluk traffic accident, and other problems ranging from the tensions arising from the recent Customs Union with Europe to the continuing war against the Kurdish liberation movement in Kurdistan and the worst income disparities in the world (see Table 1).

The bourgeois media has picked up the cue from the NSC and has been continuously pushing an anti-government line. The government has been trying to harass and bribe the media into silence. The bourgeois media has now become a big fan of freedom of the press, as far as criticising the current government goes. However, while they protest at rather mild harassment by the government, *Demokrasi*, a left-wing independent daily newspaper was banned from publishing for a month. Previously, 17 correspondents and workers of *Demokrasi* were killed by the illegal state gangs. All the mainstream newspapers and TV channels ignored the plight of *Demokrasi*, not even mentioning its banning as a news item.

The Turkish media has now become a very important tool of the military in terms of controlling the population. Distortion and disinformation have reached levels unprecedented since the early days of the military coup. For example, the International Women's Day celebrations on 8 March were reported in Turkish newspapers to be overflowing with women chanting anti-secular slogans and carrying anti-Welfare ban-

ners, whereas it was actually a march in which Kurdish and Turkish women called for solidarity against the double exploitation of women, and for socialism. In fact there were no banners separating the Welfare party from the other bourgeois parties – they were all equally condemned. The disinformation campaign is so effective that even the foreign media regularly reports that 'anti-secular' masses have taken to the streets. Then the latest May Day march, attended by a 60,000 crowd in Istanbul alone, with banners protesting against the state gangs, exploitation, corruption and calling for peace, democracy and socialism was reported by an American newspaper to be a march against the government's 'anti-secular' activities.

## Fight against low-intensity warfare

The latest events in Turkey are another example of the low-intensity warfare doctrine in practice. Summary executions, disappearances and torture against independent left-wing forces, and a massive campaign of disinformation and coercion against the general public are the two main pillars of that doctrine. The international audience is also targeted as among those that must be misled. In short, contrary to the tenor of international press coverage, Turkey is not on the brink of an anti-secular/secular civil war, but rather is a country brutally controlled by the military and the police to provide 'investment stability' for both multinational and Turkish companies (see Table 2). The Turkish working class is being pushed out of mainstream politics for all practical purposes and the dirty war against the Kurdish population continues with full force. ■

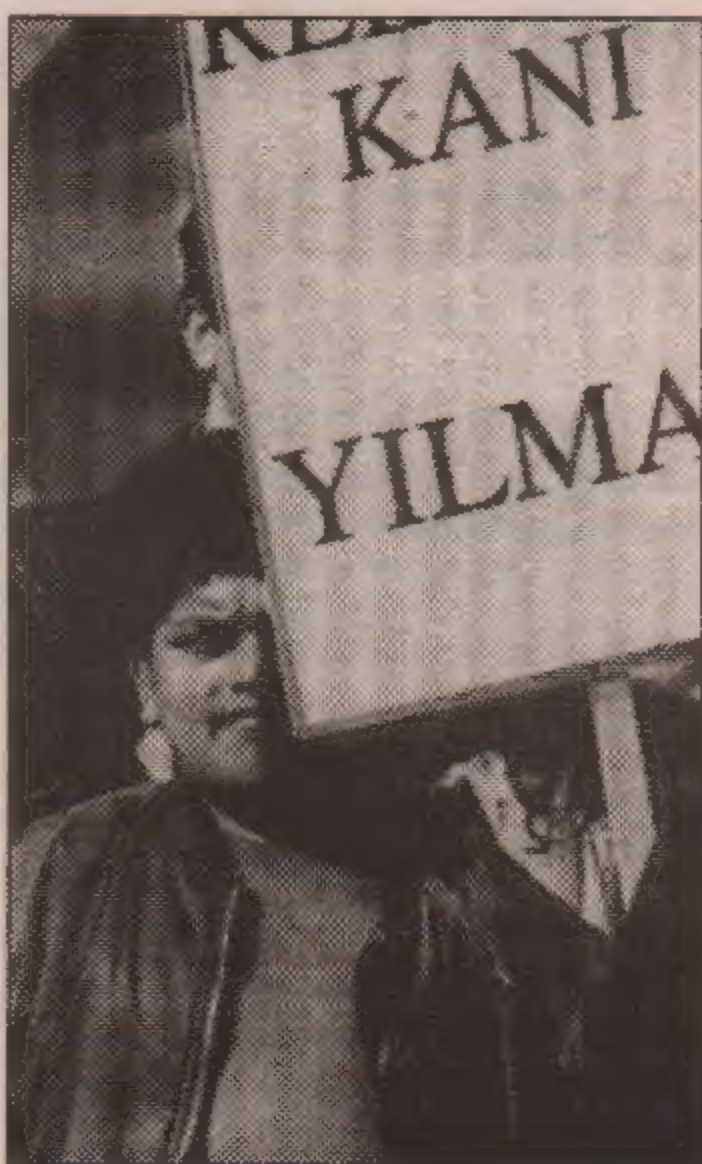
# Labour government must free Kani Yilmaz

TREVOR RAYNE

European representative of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) Kani Yilmaz was seized by Metropolitan Police on 26 October 1994 outside the Houses of Parliament on his way to address parliamentarians. He has remained in British gaols since and his appeal against extradition to Germany, where he faces trumped up criminal charges, has gone to the House of Lords on a point of law.

Kani Yilmaz was an open political figure representing the Kurds in a diplomatic capacity, visiting many European countries, meeting senior political figures and government ministers. He was a regular visitor to Britain and on the occasion of his arrest had been invited by the Labour MP for Erith and Thamesmead John Austin-Walker, in whose constituency Kani Yilmaz is now incarcerated at Belmarsh Prison.

Former Home Secretary Michael Howard justified imprisoning Kani Yilmaz under the National Security Act claiming he was a 'threat to national security'. This was a purely political move carried out at the request of the Turkish government in pursuit of a military defeat of the Kurdish people. In the two



and a half years of his imprisonment, parliamentarians have been ineffective in raising the Kani Yilmaz case; the Kurds have been left almost alone to protest. All pressure must now be applied on Home Secretary Jack Straw for the release of Kani Yilmaz and the restoration of his right to address British Parliamentarians. This is a political matter, any pretence that it is in the hands of the courts is a subterfuge. Anything less than Kani Yilmaz's release places the Labour Government in support of the war against the Kurds. ■

# War in Kurdistan

While the continuing failure of the Turkish state to subdue the Kurdish people exacerbates Turkey's economic, social and political problems, the hands of the USA and Israel can be detected in the evolving counter-insurgency strategy employed by the Turkish Army against the PKK and the Kurdish people.

The overall Turkish state and imperialist strategy has been to isolate the revolutionaries, weaken them militarily and nurture any opportunist forces within the Kurds prepared to accept the status quo. This strategy has failed so far. While the forced depopulation of the Kurdish areas of up to three million people has countered the impact of guerrilla war and reduced the possibility of liberated zones, the Turkish state has been unable to give the Kurds anything that might sustain a social basis for a significant counter to the PKK.

Over a year ago the USA brokered a Defence Pact between its two most loyal Middle East allies: Israel and Turkey. The Pact includes military training and intelligence exchanges. Methods used by the Israeli state against the Palestinians will be used against the Kurds.

Up to one million Kurds are now under a food embargo whereby villagers have to get

permission from local military commanders to buy food. Any village which joins the state-sponsored village guard system is exempt from the embargo.

Turkish army units have been deployed to dig irrigation canals, build water reservoirs, repair roads and clear pasture for livestock in selected Kurdish areas. Elsewhere they destroy them.

Istanbul- and USA-based capital has been mobilised to invest in a developing textile industry in south east Turkey/north west Kurdistan, with Europe and the USA as markets. The intention is to establish a stable and therefore loyal workforce among the dispossessed Kurds.

PKK President Ocalan noted how the Turkish army was increasingly resorting to 'the Israeli model: operations relying on planes and helicopters', rather than using land-based forces.

The war against the Kurds cannot be afforded by the Turkish state which is running trade and budget deficits that total 15% of the national income, depreciating the Turkish lira by 50% in a year. The war is funded and equipped by international finance capital based in New York, London, Paris, Frankfurt and Milan; the same powers that stand behind the Israeli state.

Trevor Rayne



Fujimori directed the assault on the embassy

# Guerrillas killed in Peru

Nestor Cerpa Cartolini and the 13 Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement guerrillas killed with him in the Japanese embassy in Lima on 22 April lived in a country where the government spends 350 times as much on each soldier as on the health of each citizen, where the rich and powerful banquet with champagne while half the population lack safe water and are malnourished. They lived in a land where living conditions for the indigenous people were better in the days of the Inca Empire than they are today.

Nestor Cerpa witnessed workers murdered for trying to improve their lives, joined the trade unions to advance the legal struggle, was imprisoned for doing so, went on hunger strike in support of framed fel-

low trade unionists, then took up the gun when no other way forward was seen.

The televised spectacle we were shown took place in a land where 40,000 people have been killed by a state permanently at war with the poor, where death squads serve the highest officials of government and 'justice' is delivered anonymously from behind a screen. A land where generals and the head of military intelligence are cocaine millionaires. When the guerrillas struck for the release of 400 imprisoned comrades, they were measured then killed, to the accompaniment of rejoicing for the banquets to come – and the silent pain of the poor. And the 'advisers' at the scene of the slaughter – the British SAS.

Trevor Rayne



There is no reason why a country as wealthy as Britain cannot afford adequate state welfare for young and old alike.

# Privatising STATE WELFARE

**T**here should be no surprise. The Labour government is merely defending the class interests of those it represents – the middle class. Britain may be a wealthy country, but that wealth is concentrated in the hands of a minority, and they are not prepared to see it spent unprofitably on the relief of poverty. Far from it: the poverty that exists today is a condition of their wealth, as it is for the affluence of the middle class. Whilst during the boom years it was possible to provide state welfare for the mass of the working class as well as the more privileged, such conditions have long since gone. Now there is a clear trade-off: middle class affluence can only be preserved at the direct expense of the mass of the working class. Labour did not come to office to end poverty: its programme is one of providing economic and political security to the middle class. Its policies on state welfare are determined by this over-riding objective.

What this means is that Labour will introduce a two-tier state welfare system, where the level of benefits or care is determined by what the individual is prepared to pay. This means increasing the level of private provision whilst reducing the state-funded component to an absolute minimum. As Chris Smith said when he was Shadow Secretary of State for Health, 'the principle must surely be that the state acts as the guarantor of all provision, the regulator of all provision – and the administrator of some.'

Labour is determined to cut the cost of state welfare, particularly for the elderly, those whose usefulness to capitalism has disappeared. 40 per cent of the £90 billion cost of state welfare is spent on state pensions and benefits for the elderly, and half the £32 billion cost of the NHS is spent on their care as well. The way it will achieve this is by cutting back all forms of welfare provision to the poorest section of pensioners, whilst keeping middle class commitment to the state sector by allowing them to 'top up' their provision through private means. The fact that privatising welfare is vastly more inefficient and costly on a per capita basis is irrelevant: the real issue is to reduce the numbers to whom welfare is made available. This can only be achieved by reducing state provision.

## The crisis in state expenditure

Behind the meaningless posturings of the election campaign lay a crisis in public expenditure which New Labour will have to address. In a report published on 9 April, the Institute for Fiscal Studies stated that 'either the current shape of the welfare state will be maintained, and the next government will have to spend – and tax – more than planned, or the welfare state will shrink and provide fewer services to fewer people'. A separate study by the accountants Coopers and Lybrands concluded that the incoming government would have to cut government spending by between £5 and £10 billion in order to bring it in line with revenue.

These cuts will have to take place in education, welfare or health, which together make up to 60 per cent of government spending. Labour is already committed to Tory plans for the next two years, which predict a rise of no more than one per cent in NHS spending. Yet to maintain services, expenditure would have to

increase by no less than eight per cent. In other words, Labour will cut NHS services by seven per cent. No government has ever attempted this before. The results will be catastrophic. They will be equivalent to cutting the workforce by 70,000 – enough to staff 20 to 30 hospitals.

The position is no different as far as local government expenditure is concerned. In March, the House of Lords ruled that local authorities can withhold or withdraw help from people when short of funds. It follows a case where Gloucestershire Local Authority cut home care services to 1,000 people to save £2.5 million in 1994. The ruling means that the availability of resources will be the deciding element in whether someone gets a service or not.

In such conditions, there are two options: either cut services, or charge people for them. In practice, both are happening. In a 1996 survey, only 11 local authorities (seven per cent) provide a free home care service for all users. This is down from 17 per cent in 1994. Almost two thirds (96) have a minimum charge for home care even for people on benefits. 26 local authorities (11 of which are Labour) expect disabled people to give up the care component of their Disability Living Allowance to pay towards the cost of their care. As more and more authorities levy such charges, and as the charges rise, so the poorest will be unable to get the services they need: only the middle class will.

## Rationing healthcare

The cuts in health spending will not only mean enormous job losses, they will mean introducing new forms of rationing. Rationing already exists: it operates through the use of waiting lists – a queuing system. This has the formal semblance of equitability, but as everyone knows, you can jump the queue if you have the money. Take a coronary artery by-pass graft: some 40 per cent of these operations are now performed privately. But those who are most in need of it are working class people: angina is twice as high among male manual workers than male non-manual workers in middle age. Health authorities already ration this operation. In 1993/94, the lowest 10 per cent of all health authorities bought on average five such operations per 100,000 head of population. The top 10 per cent bought 42 – an eight-fold difference. There are wide variations in the purchase of cataract surgery and hip replacements, with the top 10 per cent of health authorities buying twice as many operations per head of population for either category than the lowest 10 per cent. There is a large private market for both of these as well – 30 per cent of hip operations, for instance, were done privately in 1994. There is no doubt that Harriet Harman, notorious for securing a privileged education for her children, will do everything in her power to defend and extend privileged access to healthcare for her class as a whole.

Rationing – or 'priority setting' as it is called, is now a subject that is debated regularly in the newspapers. One so-called expert, Professor Alan Williams from York University's centre for health economics, argued earlier this year in the *British Medical Journal* for explicit rationing by such factors as age. He argued that limits should be set on the amount of health care to which pensioners should be entitled. However, this is already

happening: access to intensive care is already rationed according to age. But the rationing is for working class people only: as state-funded surgery becomes more limited, so middle class people will turn to private health care. Rationing and a two-tier system are inseparable.

## Privatising pensions

In 1980, pensions were indexed to price increases rather than wage rises. If the link had been retained, the single pension would now be £82.55 rather than £61.55, and the married couple pension £132.10 instead of £97.95. The single pension is now 20.3 per cent of average male manual earnings. Occupational pensions are now a privilege for a diminishing number of employees – 48 per cent in 1994 as opposed to 52 per cent in 1983. Although New Labour are reviewing pension arrangements, Frank Field has already provided the answers. Every worker earning more than £100 per week will be required to contribute towards 'a second pension. This will not be a pay-as-you-go system, where current payments cover existing pensions. Instead, each individual will have their own individual fund which will be lodged with the pension fund of their choice. The aim is to get people to invest up to 16 per cent of their annual income in this scheme.

Any privatised scheme of this character will act to preserve and exacerbate inequality. There is no pretence at a socialised system: middle class people will end up with the best pensions because they will have been able to save more. Field himself says 'For workers earning up to £100 per week the state retirement pension, currently £61.15 per week, provides a reasonable replacement retirement income'. Reasonable for whom? Not, we think, Frank Field. As it is, the onus on working class people who earn more than £100 per week will be enormous: to lose 16 per cent of an income of, say, £150 per week represents a huge burden. Yet this is what is required if public spending is to be cut – the individualisation of pension arrangements. There is no doubt that Frank Field has been given the post of Minister of State for Social Security in order to introduce this kind of scheme.

## The poor will get poorer

State welfare provision is far more efficient than privatised provision. It would only cost £2 billion to restore the state pension to the level that it would have been had it been indexed to wages rather than prices. But for Labour this is too much of a burden to be carried by the middle class. Adequate universal health care would cost another £1 or £2 billion. The same applies: the middle class is willing to pay for its own healthcare, but not for anyone else's.

The fact is now that if you are elderly and working class, you will become worse off under Labour over the next few years, because the middle class is concerned only about its own interests. The NHS will continue to become a two-tier system, where treatment will only be available if you can pay for it. The same will be true for home help services. If you are approaching retirement, the pension you will get will still be linked to prices, not wages. In the meantime, middle class people will be able to buy what is not on offer to the working class.

There is no reason why a country as wealthy as Britain cannot afford adequate state welfare for young and old alike. Its 500 richest inhabitants have between them assets worth £86 billion. There are an estimated 80,000 millionaires. 100,000 people have incomes of more than £100,000 per year. In 1994, total pension fund assets exceeded £400 billion. The following year, overseas direct investment ran to £37.8 billion; the total value of assets held abroad amounted to £244.1 billion. This in turn was exceeded by the value of overseas non-bank portfolio investments, which totalled a staggering £332.2 billion. Yet in the midst of this wealth, Labour has not only pledged not to raise the maximum rate of income tax, it has also stated quite clearly that it will not raise benefits at more than the rate of inflation. Blair's appointment of Harriet Harman and Frank Field to head the Department of Social Security reinforces the message for the poor: don't look to New Labour for any support or relief.

ROBERT CLOUGH reports.



Frank Field and Harriet Harman, now ensconced at the DSS ready to dismantle the benefits system



'We are grateful for what the Tories did but it is not the end of the story'

Frank Field



# The politics and economics of globalisation

Among those whose primary concern is for a more competitive and efficiently functioning national capitalist economy, there are diametrically opposite positions concerning the reality of globalisation. The neo-liberal right strongly approves of globalisation and the limited effectiveness of national government intervention. A more globalised economy is in many ways a more efficient one forcing governments to be more careful in handling their economies (*The Economist* 23 December 1995-5 January 1996). The removal of market constraints – free trade and deregulated labour and capital markets – is seen as the only way to increased growth, balanced trade and lower unemployment. At the other pole, with the old social democratic Keynesian strategy no longer viable, former social democrats, concerned to retain some progressive role for a reforming capitalist government, have argued that much talk about globalisation is exaggerated. The notion that there is 'one global, borderless, stateless market' is a myth. 'This global economy needs superintending and policing. Governments can and should co-ordinate their policies to manage it' (Will Hutton, *The Guardian* 17 June 1995).

This polarisation is mirrored on the socialist left. On the one side, we are told that there has been an epochal shift in capitalism in which new technology has substantially (irreversibly?) increased the power of capital over labour, fragmenting and even destroying working class organisations, and creating global market forces beyond national government control. Not to recognise these developments 'freezes us in modes and forms of struggle which are effete and ineffectual' (A Sivanandan). On the other side, globalisation is seen as 'an ideological mystification' which 'serves as an excuse for the most complete defeatism and for the abandonment of any kind of anti-capitalist project'. And that, while not denying the impact of new technologies and the destructive effects of deregulation, mass unemployment and growing poverty, we need to look elsewhere for an explanation of the long-term structural crisis of capitalism than in simplistic formulas about 'globalisation' (Ellen Meiksins Wood).<sup>2</sup>

## Globalisation and national governments

The policies of national governments in capitalist countries are mainly determined by two important dynamics: the first is the state of the national process of capital accumulation and its relative international strength; the second is the balance of class forces both nationally and internationally. It is of little surprise that the concept of 'globalisation' is being discussed: (i) during a period of stagnating national capital accumulation as excess capital is aggressively exported or deployed speculatively on the stock markets of the world to stave off a profits collapse and (ii) following a dramatic shift in the balance of class forces nationally and internationally in favour of capital after the successful counterattack against labour in the 1980s, an attack which highlighted the weakness of working class and socialist forces worldwide.

Tony Blair, the new British Labour Prime Minister, was simply giving expression to these realities when he told a conference of Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation in 1995:

'What is called globalisation is changing the nature of the nation state as power becomes more diffuse and borders more porous. Technological change is reducing the power and capacity of government to control its domestic economy free from external influence' (*Financial Times* 20 March 1996).

In effect he is reassuring the dominant sections of British capital with a very strong international presence,

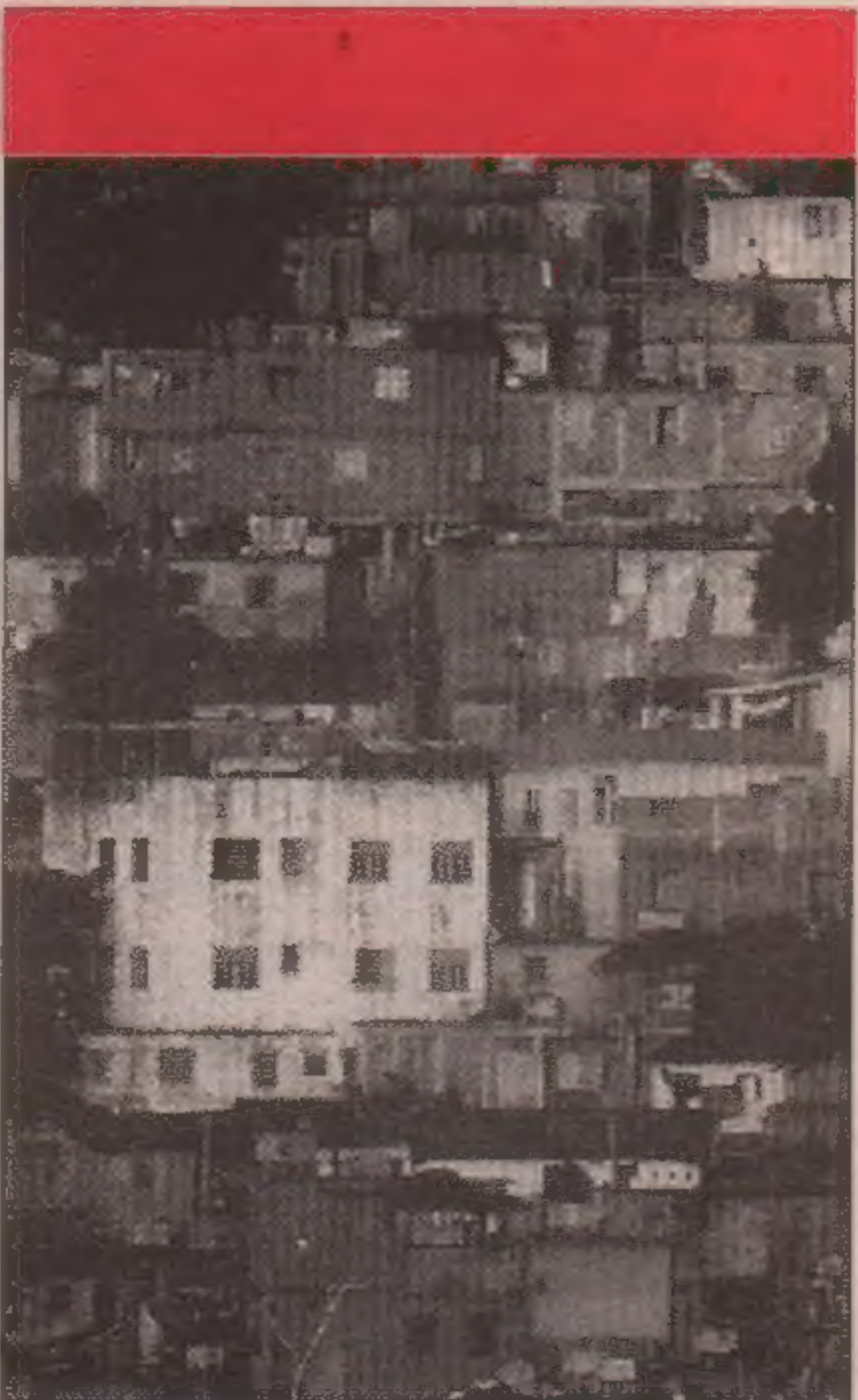
that, with domestic capital accumulation stagnating, he will not stand in the way of British capital even if this is at the expense of millions of people in Britain confronting drastic cuts in state welfare and growing impoverishment. On no other basis, given the balance of class forces, could he lead a capitalist government in present-day Britain.

The neo-liberal *Financial Times* journalist Martin Wolf reaches similar conclusions about the limited role of national governments in a global economy but plays down the impact of 'globalisation':

'When people write off the end of national economic sovereignty, it is an historically brief era that they lament. It ended not so much under the assault of an external force, the global market, but of an internal one, perceived failure. Governments were bad at much of what they were doing... Globalisation reinforced the limits already imposed by domestic constraints' (*Financial Times* 18 September 1995).

Wolf's attack on the economic role of government again gives ideological expression to the changed needs of capital in today's circumstances. His explanation differs from Blair – they speak to a different constituency – but inevitably they reach the same class standpoint.

The 'historically brief era' of state intervention in the capitalist economy after 1945 was the product of unique historical circumstances. First, inter-imperialist rivalry between the major capitalist powers since the beginning of the century had ended, temporarily, with the dominance of US imperialism over the capitalist world economy. This allowed the US economy, facing limited competition, to develop at the expense of other national capitals. Through Marshall Aid and export of capital, the US laid the basis for increasing control of world markets for US capital and a faster rate of capital accumulation at high rates of profit. Britain, with its access to the



Slums in Brazil: imperialism devastates the Third World

markets and resources of the British Empire and with little competition from its European rivals, followed in its wake. Second, a change in the balance of class forces in favour of the working class had occurred internationally after the devastation of depression, fascism and two world wars, a change reinforced by the standing of the Soviet Union and the spread of socialist revolutions and independence movements after the war.

The restoration of capital accumulation after the war was achieved, therefore, at a political cost to capital. The balance of class forces necessitated this. But it was a cost that, initially in the victorious nations and, later, in the rebuilt European economies, capital could afford. State intervention in the capitalist economy, state welfare and military spending, in these unique circumstances, underpinned the most rapid accumulation of capital ever. But the fundamental contradictions within the capital accumulation process remained. When the rate of profit began to fall and inter-imperialist rivalries re-emerged at the beginning of the 1970s, capital accumulation began to stagnate in most capitalist countries. The rising consumption institutionalised in state welfare became a barrier to the further accumulation of capital as high inflation accompanied stagnation in the major capitalist nations. State spending and state welfare had to be cut back. In Britain the first steps were taken by a Labour government a few years before Thatcher came into power. Capital went on the offensive and succeeded in changing the balance of class forces nationally and internationally, but the problems within the capital accumulation process remained. State intervention was neither responsible for the postwar boom nor the cause of the later stagnation. It was the particular circumstances of the capital accumulation process nationally and internationally which underlay both. Keynesianism and neo-liberalism are no more than ideological reflections of the changing requirements of capital in the two periods.

The growing stagnation in the capital accumulation process and the re-emergence of inter-imperialist rivalries were the result of an over-accumulation of capital – insufficient surplus value to secure both the normal profitable expansion of productive capital and to finance the growing state sector together with a rapidly expanding unproductive private sector. The huge increase in the export of capital, the growing monopolisation of capital through mergers, acquisitions and privatisations, the unprecedented autonomy of the financial system from real production alongside the cuts in state welfare, downsizing and outsourcing, mass unemployment and rapidly growing inequality, in short, globalisation, was capital's response.

Globalisation, therefore, only reinforces the limits imposed by domestic constraints on national government intervention because both result from a stagnating capital accu-

Globalisation is an ideological term. It encompasses the frenetic international expansion of capital – an expansion which has had devastating consequences for the majority of humanity. The debate around it, however, has tended to obscure rather than clarify our understanding of the forces at work. In his second article on this subject DAVID YAFFE looks at the politics and economics of globalisation.<sup>1</sup>

mulation. This is the context in which we can examine the differing class positions on globalisation.

## Globalisation and class interest

Martin Wolf quite brazenly represents the dominant ruling class interests. As a spokesperson for large capital, he is an unashamed apologist for neo-liberalism. In a recent glowing tribute to globalisation, dismissing all evidence to the contrary, he maintains it has been a force for prosperity in much of the world. 'Globalisation is the great economic event of our era. It defines what governments can – and should – do... Technology makes globalisation feasible. Liberalisation is responsible for it happening.' He celebrates its success. From 1970 to 1997 the number of countries removing exchange controls on goods and services increased from 35 to 137. A year ago, more constrained, in an article 'The global economy myth' (*Financial Times* 13 February 1996),<sup>3</sup> he argued that much of the talk about globalisation was exaggerated and governments on their own or together could do a great deal. Today he has no such reservations. In his latest article, 'Global opportunities', he tells us that governments have learned the lessons of experience and have chosen or been forced to open their economies. Running with the tide, he now argues that, on balance, globalisation has gone further than ever before (*Financial Times* 6 May 1997).

New Labour stands for the same ruling class interests. In the run up to the General Election Blair was forever stressing how Labour would accommodate multinational business. Immediately after the election he appointed Sir David Simon, chairman of British Petroleum, as a Minister of Trade and European Competitiveness. BP is accused of collaborating with military death squads in Columbia. Simon will be made a life peer. Almost the first act of the new government was to hand over control of interest rate policy to that bastion of neo-liberalism, the Bank of England. Nevertheless Blair cannot, as Wolf is able to do, conflate the 'can' and 'should' of government policy in relation to a global economy. For Blair is reliant to some degree on the middle class constituency which elected him to power. He will have to reassure the middle classes, as real economic developments threaten their security, that he will do what he can within

the constraints imposed by the global economy ('external influence'). He is acceptable to the ruling class because, unlike the discredited and divided Tories, Labour is in a better position, as economic conditions deteriorate, to prevent an alliance against capitalism developing between the poor working class and sections of the middle classes threatened with proletarianisation.

Hutton, generally regarded as ideologue for the New Labour Party, deals with the question of globalisation from a different class standpoint. He articulates the fear of the middle classes at what might occur if the New Right (neo-liberal) agenda succeeds. 'If there are no real economic and political choices... the way is open for the return of totalitarian parties of the right and left.' He fears the consequences of social breakdown. Hence his concern to play down the impact of globalisation, arguing that governments can coordinate their policies to manage it, to prevent the extreme consequences of an unrestrained market and to create a less degenerate capitalism.

The relative prosperity in Britain during the postwar boom gave rise to new privileged sections of the working class – a new middle class. This layer of predominantly educated, salaried, white collar workers grew with the expansion of the state and services sector and, in the more recent period, with the information technology revolution. Sustaining its privileges is the key to social stability in all the major capitalist nations and playing to its prejudices is the necessary condition for political parties to be elected to power. As long as there were sufficient profits from production at home and trade and investment abroad, both to give an adequate return to capital, and to finance state welfare and the growing unproductive private sector, then the social democratic consensus of the postwar years could be maintained. It was possible to guarantee the relatively privileged conditions of higher-paid workers and the middle classes while sustaining adequate living standards for the mass of the working class.

In the new conditions of capital stagnation and growing inter-imperialist rivalries in the middle of the 1970s, this consensus began to break down. The 1974-79 Labour government set monetary targets and cut state spending. The low-paid state sector workers fought back and the



winter of discontent', 1978/9, drove the higher-paid skilled workers and the middle classes into the arms of the Tory Party. Thatcher embraced this new constituency and, as Hutton says, 'the liberal professions, affluent council house tenants, homeowners, all benefited from her tax cuts, credit boom and privatisation programme.' The price was growing inequality as state welfare was cut and millions of working class people were driven into poverty to pay for Thatcher's programme. The privileges of the middle classes could only be preserved at the expense of ever-increasing numbers of impoverished working class people. In spite of the revenues from North Sea Oil, productive investment stagnated in Britain, and record amounts of capital were invested abroad. Britain was rapidly becoming a *rentier* state.

With the failure of Thatcher's economic policies at the end of the 1980s, and with poverty and inequality rapidly accelerating, inroads began to be made into the standard of living of sections of the middle classes. It is the potentially explosive consequences of this development that drives Hutton. He offers his alternative to 'globalisation', to an unrestrained and deregulated capitalism. First, he says, we must alter the way the British financial system works – essentially from seeking high, liquid, short-term gains, irrespective of location, to giving a long-

term commitment to regenerating the productive base of the British economy – a process which, he says, requires a political revolution to take power away from the entrenched 'conservative hegemony'. Britain has to be transformed into a high investment, high growth economy. Second, a coalition supporting social welfare has to be rebuilt. For this to happen the middle classes must opt in, rather than opt out into the privatised provision of the neo-liberal agenda. The middle classes, he argues, can be given 'a vested interest in the entire system' by 'incorporating inequality into the public domain'. A core system for the mass of the working class with the middle classes able to buy in the extra quality services they require – in short 'nationalising inequality' within the state system.

However, if the degeneration of capitalism into a parasitic and rentier form is now a necessary trend emerging in all the mature capitalist nations, Hutton's response to globalisation – what I have called the political economy of the new middle class – is both idealist and reactionary.<sup>4</sup>

We can now understand the significance of Sivanandan's standpoint. Living in a country where knowledge, culture and politics are dominated by the concerns and prejudices of middle class people; in which the poor and oppressed working class are outside the political process and ignored by the official labour move-

ment and where social relations seem frozen, repetitive and unchanging, it could appear that an epochal shift has occurred in capitalism and that the socialist project, at least as it is traditionally understood, has to be buried. We note Sivanandan's warning not to underestimate the dangers posed by the so-called 'culture of postmodernism', in a society where "knowledge workers" who run the Information Society, who are in the engine room of power, have become collaborators in power'. But we respond as materialists. History has not ended. And globalisation, if it is anything, is a sign of the crisis of capitalism, of increasing instability, of rapidly changing circumstances in a world of obscene and growing inequality. Social relations are not fixed. The conditions which spawned a new middle class and turned it into a bedrock of social stability in the imperialist nations after the war have ended. Today it is those privileged conditions which are being threatened. Hutton, at least, recognises this – hence his terrible fear of a return to the extremes of class conflict that dominated the 1930s. Sivanandan is far too preoccupied with the ideological posturing of a small elite of academics and opinion formers caught up with globalisation and beneficiaries of it.

Ellen Meiksins Wood develops a number of crucial points in her reply to Sivanandan. Firstly, more giant corporations with a global reach, and more international organisations serving the interests of capital, in no way imply a unified international capitalist class. The 'global' market ensures the 'internationalisation of competition' – a contradictory process. On the one hand it does mean new forms of capitalist integration and cooperation across national boundaries but, on the other hand, it also means active competition between national and regional capitalists. 'So the "global" economy if anything may mean less and not more capitalist unity.' The overall consequence of 'globalisation' far from integrating capital is at least as likely to produce disintegration.

Secondly, the proposition that there is an inverse relation between the internationalisation of the economy and the power of the state fails to acknowledge that 'globalisation' presupposes the state. 'The nation-state is the main conduit through which national (or indeed multinational) capital is inserted into the global market.' Transnational capital may be more effective than the old-style military imperialism in penetrating every corner of the world, but it accomplishes this, in the main, through the medium of local capital and local states. It may well, ultimately, rely on the military power of the last remaining 'super-power' to sustain the sovereignty of the market. Further, it depends on such local political jurisdictions to maintain the conditions of economic stability and labour discipline which are the conditions for profitable investment. And finally, new kinds of inter-imperialist rivalry will emerge in which the nation state is still the principal agent.

From this she advances her most important political point: the nation state is still the terrain of (class) struggle. 'If the state is the channel through which capital moves in the "globalised" economy, then it is equally the means by which an anti-capitalist force could sever capital's lifeline.'

These arguments go a great deal of the way to undermining Sivanandan's position. But there is something lacking. It is perhaps best highlighted in the undue weight Wood gives to the ideological impact of the concept of globalisation as it is commonly understood. 'It is the heaviest albatross around the neck of the left today'. 'In the current conception of globalisation, left joins right in accepting that "There Is No Alternative" – not just to capitalism, but...

to a more or less (the right goes for more, the left somewhat less) ruthlessly "flexible" capitalism.' She goes on to say that if their conception of globalisation were an accurate reflection of what was happening in the world today her ideological objections wouldn't count for much and we would have to accept that the socialist project is dead.

This is all very true but something more is surely needed. Ideas only become a material force when taken up by the masses. The ideological struggle is of political importance when it falls on fertile ground. In periods when the poor and impoverished working class are outside the political process, the politics of the left, in the main, reflect their class position in capitalist society – as part of the privileged working class or educated white collar and professional workers who form the backbone of the new middle class. The recomposition of the working class as a fighting force against capitalism has to be the product of developments within capitalism itself, it will not be the result of ideological combat alone. This process is already taking place as capitalist governments deregulate labour, attack state welfare, undermine the democratic right to protest and workers' rights to organise, attempt to divide the working class through racism and sexism, and destroy the environment. The ideological struggle has to be combined with the political organisation and defence of those sections of the working class under attack and fighting back. *We need to show how developments within capitalism are making this possible.* That is why a great deal more is required from the analysis of the latest stage of capitalism to finally lay to rest the ghost of globalisation.

### The reality of globalisation

It is important not to underestimate the significance of globalisation. It might well be an 'ideological mystification' in the hands of a Martin Wolf or some intellectuals and academics on the political left, but its impact on the economic and political lives of the vast majority of humanity is of great political consequence. To say, as I have argued in my earlier article on globalisation, that 'far from it being new it is a return to those unstable features of capitalism which characterised imperialism before the First World War' is not to dismiss its importance but, on the contrary, to highlight it. It is beginning to create the very conditions which produced those dramatic shocks to the international capitalist economy and which led to the revolutionary developments in the first decades of the twentieth century. So what then are the crucial components of globalisation which suggest these developments?

- Multinational companies (MNCs) are the principle vehicle of imperialism's drive to redivide the world according to economic power. In 1995 Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) outflows increased by a massive 38 per cent to \$317bn, with a record \$100bn going to Third World countries. That investment is concentrated in three competing power blocs, the 'Triad' of the European Union, Japan and the United States and their regional cluster of countries. 76 per cent of the investment in Third World countries (1993-5) went to only 10 countries. Five imperialist countries, United States, UK, Germany, Japan and France, were responsible for almost two-thirds of the total outflows in 1995. The United States (\$96bn), UK (\$38bn) and Germany (\$35bn) all exported record amounts.<sup>5</sup>

- Most MNCs are nationally based, controlled by national shareholders, and trade and invest multinationally with a large majority of sales and assets in their home country. A recent study showed 70-75 per cent value added by multinational compa-

nies was produced in the home country. They are highly concentrated. Only 100 MNCs, 0.3 per cent of the total, all from imperialist countries, own one-third (\$1.4 trillion) of the total FDI investment stock. The process of concentration continues internationally through mergers and acquisitions. Cross-border mergers and acquisitions doubled between 1988 and 1995 to \$225bn.

- Globalisation is devastating the lives of millions of people. Even the World Bank admits that in the case of the ex-Soviet bloc 'transition has relegated an entire generation to economic idleness.' Output in Russia fell by 40 per cent between 1990-1995 and between 16 and 30 per cent in the other countries. Growth has been falling over the last 15 years in about 100 countries with almost a third of the world's people, dramatically reducing the incomes of 1.6bn people. The declines are unprecedented, exceeding in duration and sometimes in depth the Great Depression of the 1930s. One billion people, 30 per cent of the world's workforce, are either jobless or unemployed. Even in the imperialist countries, 100m people live below the poverty line, 30m are unemployed and more than 5m are homeless.<sup>6</sup>

- The world is becoming more unstable. \$1,230bn a day flows through the foreign exchange markets. Third World Debt, at a record \$1,940bn, continues to increase despite massive debt repayment. A formidable \$55 trillion is gambled on the world's derivatives market. All the major banks are large players. Barclays, for example, has liabilities of £922bn, more than 80 times its capital base. A crash in the stockmarket will leave them facing huge losses. Growth in world trade halved last year because of a sharp deterioration in the performance of the so-called Asian 'tigers'. The conflict in Zaire has started a new scramble for Africa as inter-imperialist rivalry intensifies. Finally, inequality between rich and poor countries and between rich and poor in all countries has reached unprecedented levels and is still growing.

These are not the conditions of an unchanging world. They are ones where the socialist message can once again take root. Throughout the world, from workers in Korea to guerrillas in Mexico, from public sector workers in France to landless peasants in Brazil, people are fighting for change. In Britain new alliances are being built with environmental campaigners taking to the streets to defend dockers in Liverpool. Globalisation is a long-term structural crisis of capitalism. It is laying the ground for turning what Ellen Meiksins Wood calls 'various fragments of opposition' to capitalism into conscious class struggle. ■

1. See 'Globalisation: a redivision of the world by imperialism' in *Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!* 131 June/July 1996.

2. These positions appear in 'Capitalism, globalisation, and epochal shifts: an exchange' in *Monthly Review* Vol 48 pp19-32. That diametrically opposed positions on the significance of globalisation are held by writers throughout the political spectrum from 'right' to 'left' only adds to the confusion.

3. This was a favourable review of a book by Paul Hirst and Grahame Thompson, *Globalisation in Question* Polity Press 1996. Material from this book is used in my earlier article on globalisation. They hold a similar position to that of Hutton above, arguing that 'nation states, and forms of international regulation created and sustained by nation states, still have a fundamental role in providing governance of the economy (p185).'

4. Quotes from Hutton are from his book *The State We're In* Jonathan Cape 1995. For my review of this book see 'The political economy of the new middle class' in *Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!* 124 April/May 1995.

5. See *World Investment Report* (WIR) UN 1996 for information. Other figures are taken from my earlier article or earlier WIR reports.

6. Figures from *The World Development Report* OUP 1996 and *The Human Development Report* OUP 1996.



Renault car workers protesting against redundancies



**D**uring the eight-month long battle between the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Zaire (ADFL) and the disintegrating Mobutu dictatorship, the capitalist press, with the unashamed confidence and arrogance of the powerful, speaks brazenly of US and European powers battling it out to grab for themselves the largest portion of Zaire's fabulous wealth. The concerns of the people, their hopes and aspirations, do not figure at all. The British *Observer* referred to the great power rivalry in Zaire as: 'a latter-day scramble for the mineral wealth of Africa.' (19 January 1997)

The US *Wall Street Journal* was even less abashed: 'Despite chaos and disintegration, Zaire is wide open for business... Zaire's vast mineral resources are beckoning foreign companies, prompting a scramble that recalls the grab for wealth 120 years ago... American, Canadian, South African [and Belgian] mining companies are negotiating deals with the rebels [hoping] to win a piece of what is widely considered Africa's richest geological prize - and one of the richest of the world.' (15 April 1997)

In April the bells began to toll even louder for Mobutu. The ADFL captured Mbuji-Mayi and Lubumbashi, respectively the main sources of the country's diamond and copper deposits. Whoever controls these areas controls Zaire. So the mining multinationals, after 37 years of mutually beneficial collaboration with Mobutu, deserted him, just as he lay in hospital dying of cancer. With bags full of money and reworded contracts they have been rushing to shake hands and sign deals with ADFL leader Laurent Kabila, temporarily headquartered in Goma. All the major players are there: De Beers Consolidated Mines Ltd, Anglo-American Corporation, Tenke Mining Corporation, American Mineral, Diamond Field Resources. Even the notorious Belgian Union Minière, dominant in colonial times, is seizing the opportunity to re-establish itself. These companies are engaged in a ruthless behind-the-

# ZAIRE

## the redivision of Africa

As the 37-year-old Mobutu regime in Zaire finally comes to an end, EDDIE ABRAHAM examines a sordid story of greed and thievery on the part of the major capitalist powers

scenes war to secure the best contracts for themselves. As for issues like a decent wage for the mine workers, a decent pension, health and safety, a welfare and education system - all of which could easily be financed by the country's wealth - nothing is planned to change. The poor will remain poor whilst their labour will enable the multinationals to make enormous profits.

American Minerals was one of the first to close down headquarters in Mobutu-controlled territory and reopen in Goma. Alexander Boulle of American Minerals and a power behind Diamond Field Resources, with an eye on the future, also put his chartered Lear jet at the disposal of ADFL leaders. In return, when De Beers, still anxious about a possible Mobutu comeback, refused to open offices in ADFL-controlled Kisangani, Boulle was offered the diamond-buying licence for \$25,000. It used to cost De Beers \$150,000. Boulle now runs the only licensed diamond-buying office in Kisangani. The ADFL also offered Boulle a captured consignment of diamonds scheduled for De Beers. De Beers protested but were nevertheless forced to bid for them, eventually paying \$5m. After ADFL forces cap-

**Imperialism has always sought to control Zaire, either through colonial or neo-colonial means. Since independence in 1960, Zaire has also been a constant sphere of contention for supremacy among the major powers**

tured Lubumbashi, Tenke Mining quickly switched its loyalties. A London company representative noted: 'We have lost just three hours in total, and that was welcoming the Alliance soldiers.'

The new scramble for Zaire is driven by the country's enormous natural wealth and its strategic position in Africa. Zaire is estimated to have 60% of the world's cobalt and the largest supply of high-grade copper. After Australia it is the world's largest producer of industrial diamonds. Its gold reserves are huge. If

utilised to the full, Zaire has the potential to produce 13% of the world's electricity. Its fertile land can sustain large-scale cotton, coffee, rubber, oil palm, sugar, maize, tea and groundnut production. Combined with this natural wealth, the fact that Zaire has common frontiers with nine states makes it of vital strategic military and political importance too. In the words of Kwame Nkrumah, 'the size and pivotal position of the Congo [as it was then] furnishes the greatest military advantage, either for the purposes of attack or defence when fighting in Africa... The Congo is the area from which the domination of Africa can be assured.'

Imperialism has therefore always sought to control Zaire, either through colonial or neo-colonial means. Since independence in 1960, Zaire has also been a constant sphere of contention for supremacy among the major powers. The struggle has been particularly sharp as the US strove to undermine French influence founded on decades of French support for Mobutu. Up to April the French continued to support Mobutu, even facilitating the supply of mercenaries to his regime. They abandoned him only after the ADFL

seized control of the country's mineral wealth deposits. The *Financial Times* noted that 'though now working in tandem with Washington in supporting the Zairean negotiations, French officials remain irritated, and a little bitter, at what they claim is evidence that the US had earlier armed and trained Mr Kabila through Uganda.' (18 April 1997)

Indeed Kabila is a product of an alliance of various African countries, such as Rwanda, Uganda and Angola, whose efforts to topple Mobutu were endorsed by the US. The *Financial Times* claims that 'many Zaireans assume that only funding by a US... greedy for its mineral riches' accounts for the ADFL's successes. It adds that through Kabila the US has 'dealt an irreversible blow' to French influence in the region.

The ADFL is led by factions totally committed to capitalism and 'free market liberalism', but has secured a degree of popular support by promising material improvements for the people through the installation of a 'social market economy'. If Kabila becomes head of state he will be under pressure to meet popular demands. To minimise such pressure, and to prevent any popular insurrections or disintegration which could call into question the new imperialist plunder of Zaire, the major imperialist powers have pressurised Kabila to enter negotiations with the old regime and with discredited 'establishment opposition' figures such as Etienne Tshisekedi. And the nearer Mobutu's end, the greater are the number of leading scoundrels from his administration preparing an opportunist switch to Kabila as security for their privilege. In this exercise they have received the invaluable support of the South African ANC government, whose success in securing the stability of capitalism in South Africa is much admired by imperialism. By means of negotiations the imperialists are hoping to secure an orderly, bourgeois non-revolutionary transfer of power to the ADFL, thus assuring that the post-Mobutu era will be business as usual for the multinationals. ■

### The case of PATRICE LUMUMBA

Patrice Lumumba (1925-1961) was an outstanding leader of the Congolese (now Zairean) anti-imperialist movement during the struggle for independence from Belgian rule. When Zaire became independent in June 1960, the Belgian government, in alliance with the US, France and the United Nations, did all in their power to retain it under their neo-colonial control. The first stage in this process was a brutal assault on the Congolese National Movement (MNC) headed by Lumumba.

At the 1884-85 Berlin Conference, the Congo - a vast and fabulously rich territory of some 2.3m sq miles - was given to Belgian King Leopold II as a personal gift! He immediately opened it to mining and cotton capitalists from Belgium. The result was the systematic expropriation of land. Hundreds of thousands of dispossessed and impoverished people migrated to urban slums and shanty towns. Those who remained on the land were transformed into virtual chattel slaves, forced to cultivate cotton instead of food crops. Peasants unable to meet imposed production quotas had their hands chopped off or were murdered. This dispossessed peasantry formed the foundation of the Congolese resistance to colonial rule. They were joined by the urban population, also impoverished and relentlessly harassed and brutalised.

Anti-colonial resistance, a feature of the Congolese people's history, came to a head with the massive popular uprisings in 1959. It was during this period that Patrice Lumumba came to prominence. Pitted against him and vying for the leadership of the popular movement was the pathetically weak Congolese ruling class. As the Belgian colonists reserved control of all manufacturing, trade and transport for whites, the indigenous Congolese



The rebel army on the march to Kinshasa: the imperialists hope to force a compromise in order to preserve their interests

bourgeoisie was entirely marginal. It was formed from a stratum which rendered its loyal, religious and educational services to the Belgian colonialists as they sought to control the country. With the gathering strength of the national liberation movement, the Belgians set about strengthening this class in order to use it as an instrument to secure neo-colonial rule over the Congo and its wealth.

The political programme of the Congolese bourgeoisie, to which Lumumba also initially subscribed, consisted of the most moderate, humble supplications to the Belgian bourgeoisie. It was ideologically more right-wing than the Belgian colonialists and its hostility to state enterprise and any state intervention in indus-

try was accompanied by an appeal to the Belgian authorities to help develop a black middle class. Lumumba, even when sharing this basic outlook, had two particular positions which were to push him closer to the mass movement and then into its leadership. As a staunch defender of the poor peasantry, he refused to accept proposals that they buy back land confiscated by colonials. Arguing that this would benefit only the richer peasants, he demanded an unconditional return of land to the poor peasant. Secondly, Lumumba was a staunch defender of women's equality and fought hard to change Congolese women's almost slave-like subjugation.

Shortly after returning from the 1958

anti-colonial, Pan-Africanist Accra Conference in 1958, Lumumba formed the MNC which was much more responsive to the needs of the peasantry and the urban poor. As Lumumba and the MNC gained in strength and influence, the Belgians responded by nurturing tribalism and bribing a stratum of the petit bourgeoisie. The mining companies openly financed pro-capitalist right-wing parties and were confident that with colonial backing they would win the planned 1960 elections. In mineral-rich Katanga (now Shaba), they backed Moïse Tshombe and set the ground for secession in the event of parties hostile to mining interests winning the elections. But the MNC proved strong enough to win

and Lumumba became independent Congo's first prime minister.

The multinationals and their state forces responded immediately, bribing President Kasavubu to remove Lumumba as Prime Minister. These 'constitutional' means failed as both houses of the newly established parliament backed Lumumba against the President. So imperialism set about organising the secession of Katanga and instigated a military coup led by Moïse Tshombe. Supported by the CIA, US dollars and European mercenaries, they launched a merciless war against the MNC. Belgian troops, in defiance of international law, returned to occupy Katanga. Lumumba himself was arrested but managed to flee. On his way back to the capital Stanleyville (now Kinshasa) he received a hero's welcome in the towns and villages he passed through.

Lumumba then made the greatest mistake of his political life. He requested UN intervention to aid the democratically elected Congolese government. His hopes were brutally dashed. The UN became the critical and decisive anti-Lumumba military force. UN forces, organised by US military personnel, were deployed across the whole of the Congo with the exception of Katanga, which had been illegally occupied by Belgian troops. The UN disarmed Lumumba's troops, silenced his radio broadcasts and prevented him travelling freely across the country. Meanwhile Moïse Tshombe's troops ravaged the land. In February 1961 Lumumba was arrested once again, tortured, humiliated and finally murdered. Having removed Lumumba from the scene, Tshombe was installed as Prime Minister until 1965 when Mobutu came to power in a new military coup. Thus the multinationals secured their position in Zaire for some 37 years. With Mobutu's regime discredited and its leader nearly dead, they are once again searching for new ways to control and plunder the Congo. ■



\*CUBA VIVE! \*CUBA VIVE! \*CUBA VIVE! \*CUBA VIVE! \*CUBA VIVE! \*CUBA VIVE! \*CUBA VIVE! \*CUBA VIVE! \*CUBA VIVE! \*CUBA VIVE!

# Helms-Burton Act: imperialists strike a deal

On 11 April the European Union and United States reached an agreement to stave off their impending trade dispute over the US Helms-Burton Law, in a move pronounced by EU trade commissioner Sir Leon Brittan as 'a great victory' for Europe. But for the Cuban people the agreement is anything but that, cementing as it does the mutual determination of US and European imperialism to destroy socialism in Cuba.

**T**he Helms-Burton Act, the latest move by the United States to tighten their 36-year blockade of Cuba, was hurriedly signed by President Clinton in February 1996, following the shooting down by the Cuban airforce of two planes manned by the counter-revolutionary Miami-based Brothers to the Rescue. The Act aims at nothing less than destroying Cuba's revolutionary government and replacing it with US stooges. What provoked outrage amongst Cuba's trading partners, however, particularly Canada, Mexico and the European Union, was not this gross infringement of Cuba's sovereignty but the means by which the Act sets out to achieve it. Title III of the Act - which has so far been waived by Clinton in the face of international pressure - authorises private US court cases against foreign companies 'trafficking' in Cuban assets expropriated by the revolution. Title IV requires the US to deny visas to executives, directors and big shareholders - and their families - of companies using such assets. (Title IV has so far been used against officials of Canadian mining company Sherritt International and Grupo Domos of Mexico.) So great was Britain's anger at this attempted infringement of its right to trade that in 1996 for the first



Cuban armed forces celebrate in Havana's main square next to the Che Guevara monument

time it voted with the overwhelming majority at the UN General Council to condemn the US blockade. The EU also introduced counter-legislation which would allow European companies to be prosecuted in member states if they cooperated with US investigations or pulled out of Cuba under pressure from Washington, and threatened to refuse visas to US directors.

The EU then set out to challenge the law through the World Trade Organisation's disputes panel. In February the US blocked the esta-

blishment of a panel and threatened to ignore any eventual ruling, arguing that the law was a matter of 'national security' and not a trade matter. Capitalists on all sides began to panic about a trade feud that would undermine the authority of the WTO. The *Financial Times*, mouthpiece of the ruling class, begged for 'cool heads to prevail'. In March, talks were set up between Stuart Eizenstat, US undersecretary of commerce, and Leon Brittan and in April Europe agreed to drop its case against the US in return for Clinton suspending Title III indefinitely.

Maintaining foreign trade and investment is vital for the Cuban economy; the Helms-Burton Act has already disrupted important foreign financing in the sugar industry. Anything that weakens the impact of the law is to be welcomed. But this deal is something of a poisoned chalice for Cuba, for it was brokered entirely on the understanding that Europe would harden its position against the Cuban revolution and condemn publicly Cuba's so-called 'human rights violations' and call for moves towards greater 'democracy'. Trading relations will increasingly come with strings attached. Already, spurred on by Spain's new Conservative government, at its Dublin summit the EU had begun to lay down conditions on its commercial relations with Cuba, declaring that Cuba's sovereignty was 'legitimate only by means of free and regular elections' and trade relations were incumbent on Cuba respecting 'internationally held values, which are common to us all'.

Nor should anyone suppose Britain will take a different position under a Labour government. Both Tony Blair and the new Foreign Secretary Robin Cook have made their positions clear in letters to individuals - condemning what they describe as Cuba's 'abuse of human rights and failure to introduce democratic elections'. Those who defend the Cuban revolution must be clear - the US and Europe share the same goal: the overthrow of Cuban socialism and the triumph of the market. They differ only on how to get there. Our job must be to defend the Cuban revolution and the human rights it has guaranteed to all the people - rights like housing, health care and education and the socialist democracy through which those rights are defended. We can only do that by building a movement that supports Cuban socialism and fights to destroy the Helms-Burton law and the US blockade in its entirety.

Cat Wiener

## IN BRIEF

### Cubans reject US bribe

In April Clinton published an open letter offering Cuba up to \$8 million to get rid of Fidel and Raul Castro and embrace capitalism. The response? Over 250,000 members of the FA (Cuban armed forces), joined by hundreds of thousands of members of the youth, students and women's organisations, trade unions and Committees for the Defence of the Revolution mobilised, debated and signed the Declaration of 20th-Century Independence Fighters reaffirming their commitment to their leaders, the Cuban Communist Party and the defence of their revolution. Fidel Castro marked the launching of the Declaration with a speech in Havana's Revolution Square, demanding: 'What crude capitalism could maintain between 250,000 and 300,000 teachers in this country? What garbage capitalism could maintain 62,000 doctors? What capitalism could maintain the sense of justice and dignity that exists in this country?...What would they leave for our workers, our pensioners? What would we be, if not something worse than Puerto Rico?'

### World Festival

All over Cuba, preparations are underway for hosting the 14th World Festival of Youth and Students in July/August, when 5,000 young people from around the world will participate in ten days of political discussion and cultural exchange. Rock around the Blockade and RCG activists will be joining a delegation of 150 young British people, organised by the British Preparatory Committee, and is contributing £500 towards the BPC's £10,000 target for the international fund for the festival. Help send an FRFI journalist to the festival - please send donations to FRFI, BCM Box 5909, WC1N 3XX.

### Container Appeal

The Cuba Solidarity Campaign's third Container Appeal has been launched to send material aid to Cuba and help break the US blockade. If you can help with materials, especially educational aid, or money, please contact: CSC Container for Cuba Appeal, 129 Seven Sisters Rd, London N7 7QG, tel: 0171 263 6452.

### Che commemoration t-shirt

Gerry Hanratty, an Irish political prisoner currently on remand at Belmarsh, has been prevented by the prison authorities from receiving a Che Guevara t-shirt because of its 'political content'. It's good to know that 30 years after his death Che still inspires the same fear in capitalist reactionaries as he did when alive! Send letters of protest against this political censorship to: The Governor, HMP Belmarsh, Western Way, London SE28 0EB. To order your own t-shirt (white, with black and red design of Che and 'Viva Cuba' on the front and Che's words 'A true revolutionary is motivated by great feelings of love' on the back), price £7 send your orders to Rock around the Blockade, c/o FRFI, BCM Box 5909, London WC1N 3XX, specifying XL, L, M or S with cheques/POs made payable to Rock around the Blockade.

### Rock around the Blockade dayschool

### The Legacy of Che

A day of political discussion to celebrate the life and ideas of Che Guevara on the 30th anniversary of his death in combat

Sunday 18 May 10.30am-4.30pm, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1 (Holborn tube) £5/£2 concessions (includes food).

Speakers include:  
Cuban Embassy;  
Professor Theo MacDonald on Socialism and Man,  
David Yaffe on Che's political and economic

thought and Trevor Rayne on Che's internationalism.

For further details tel: 0171 837 1688



## Cuba's response to AIDS

The AIDS sanatorium at Los Cocos outside Havana is a far cry from the image perpetuated in the West of an institution where patients are forcibly restrained. There are 150 houses in which patients live, free to come and go as they please, set in extensive grounds amongst palm trees and lawns. RICHARD ROQUES visited the sanatorium with other members of the No Pasaran! brigade in January.

describes 3TC as a good drug - in their own trials it prolongs patients' lives. Of the early sanatoria policy, he says: 'It was not my decision, but at the beginning we wanted to offer patients the best treatment, and we had to study the spread of the epidemic in Cuba. We needed time to think and find every patient who caught the virus.'

Nearly 100% of Cubans have been voluntarily tested for the HIV virus. Cuba's early response to the epidemic meant they could identify nearly every source of infection. The first tests were carried out on those who had contracted any sexually transmitted disease and the virus was detected within three months of infection. Safe sex was then discussed with them to ensure they did not transmit the virus.

However, the blockade makes it very difficult to get medicines and there is a shortage of condoms. Dr Perez appears on television and radio talking about AIDS and always receives calls after these broadcasts offering help.

At first HIV transmission was predominantly by heterosexual intercourse; now people increasingly see it as affecting homosexuals. We pass the house of a patient - an AIDS activist - whose stickers read: 'Fight



AIDS, not people with AIDS'. Most AIDS activists in Cuba focus on AIDS prevention work in schools and the community, and there is no hostility to people with AIDS. Most live quite openly in the community.

We meet Adolfo Lozano Mendez, who has lived in the sanatorium for seven years. He still receives the same salary. His wife lives with him and he visits his children whenever he wants. His house has a bathroom, sitting room and air conditioning.

### Trials for an AIDS vaccine

Dr Perez is directing the trials for an AIDS vaccine. Clinical trials have taken place and now the vaccine is being administered to 24 volunteers, all medical researchers themselves. So far there have been no worrying side effects. The next stage will involve a group of 1,000 volunteers.

'There has been interest from around the world', Dr Perez told us - a masterpiece of understatement.

Cuba has been condemned worldwide by campaigners and gay groups for its treatment of people with AIDS. The Cuban medical authorities now feel their initial response was wrong and it was speedily revised. Now the voices that condemned Cuba are silent. But all progressive people, and AIDS activists and the gay movement in particular, must start to take up the issue of Cuba and its treatment of AIDS and make sure that any success with its new AIDS vaccine is reported and the vaccine made accessible to all - unlike Cuba's successful vaccine for meningococcus B, ignored and denigrated by a hostile British press and medical establishment, at the cost of people's lives. We must not let this happen again.

**W**e were shown around by sanatorium director Dr Jorge Perez - the first person to diagnose an HIV-positive person in Cuba in 1985. The National Commission on AIDS had been set up in 1983. In April 1986, Cuba acquired the equipment to detect the HIV virus, and the system of sanatoria was introduced. This initial response was given such widespread international media attention that many people still believe people with AIDS are imprisoned in Cuba. In fact, the system of closed sanatoria lasted only some eight months. We found much to admire in the Cuban response to AIDS as we walked round Los Cocos.

There are currently 278 residents and 274 outpatients. On diagnosis the patient is discussed with and given time to decide where they would like to be treated. Every HIV+ patient is seen by a physician every 15 days. Throughout Cuba approximately 700 patients are being treated, either in sanatoria or at home, and numbers affected have reached a plateau.

Los Cocos has a library, laboratory, observation ward, psychiatric ward for those with AIDS dementia and a chronic ward. All facilities are free and those who can no longer work receive 100% of their salary, are rehoused and given a free television. We see dinner being prepared in the kitchen - the menu includes pork chops, ham, eggs, chips, salad and strawberries.

Patients are treated with a combination of AZT, DDI and 3TC. Some are treated with interferon and transferon factor. The clinic does not have protease inhibitors and Dr Perez has applied to the government for \$5 million to acquire them. I tell him of the controversy over AZT and he says he believes it is beneficial. He also



# Bridgewater Four

## = freedom but not justice

The release on bail of the three surviving members of the 'Bridgewater Four' in February was greeted with jubilation outside the Appeal Court and gave fresh hope to the many wrongfully convicted men and women who remain in British gaols. **NICKI JAMESON** examines the current struggle against 'miscarriages of justice'.

**O**n hearing of the release of Michael Hickey, Vincent Hickey and Jim Robinson, framed prisoner Tony Poole wrote to FRFI:

'Words can't really describe how I feel when I see other innocent people released, especially ones we've had the pleasure of meeting. They have all helped to give me strength and hope to carry on. They have endured much pain and suffering and sadly I don't think that will ever fully leave them, even outside.'

As FRFI goes to press, the appeal hearing into the case is entering its fourth and final week. A prosecution QC has admitted that none of the convictions are safe and the Crown is not even attempting to deny that the 'confession' of Patrick Molloy (the fourth man convicted of the killing of Carl Bridgewater, who died in prison in 1981) was a police forgery, and therefore that the evidence against all four men was 'flawed'.

'Flawed' is putting it mildly. Molloy was himself shown a forged confession, supposedly written by Vincent Hickey but, it is now clear, written by members of the West Midlands Serious Crime Squad. He was held for ten days without access to a solicitor and had his own 'confession' battered out of him by these same 'detectives': John Perkins, Graham Leake and John Robbins. Other than Molloy's statement, virtually nothing connected the four men to the murder and it was certainly that statement which convinced jury foreman Tim O'Malley (who in 1993 publicly announced that he was now sure that the men were innocent) of their guilt.

### Damage limitation

Although it has no choice but to finally acquit the Bridgewater Four, the Crown is still pursuing the line that this will be a 'technical' acquittal on the sole basis of the forged confession and that some or all of the defendants are really guilty.

As Tony Poole puts it:

'I hate to see the way the media are helping to play up the single point of Pat Molloy's forged confession. Of course it is important but as their solicitor Jim Nichol said, it was number 47 on his list of 50 appeal points. Our legal system (helped by the media) likes to make it look as if the innocent are still guilty and imply that you shouldn't be too hard on the police, as they only set them up because they thought that they were guilty (or are guilty). I'm told that the police call this "noble cause corruption".'

### Fifty years' wrongful imprisonment

The Bridgewater Four spent a total of 50 years in gaol, during which time there were two appeal hearings and eight police inquiries into the case. From the early days of their imprisonment when they were labelled 'child-killers' and subjected

to constant beatings from other prisoners, egged on by screws, to the later years when all prisoners and the majority of the general public knew these were not the men who killed Carl Bridgewater, but still they languished in gaol, the torment they have suffered is unimaginable. In 1984 and 1993 Michael Hickey and Jim Robinson staged the two longest rooftop protests the British prison system has ever known. Michael Hickey has had three nervous breakdowns and spent time in Ashworth Secure Hospital. The mental and physical strain on the three men and their families is beyond repair by any sum of compensation money the state can give them.



Winston Silcott

### The Criminal Procedure and Investigations Act

There has been a lot of nonsense in the press about how the release of the Bridgewater Four is the righting of the 'last great miscarriage of justice'. Unfortunately, there are still hun-

dreds of innocent people behind bars and the future does not look too bright for them or for anyone wrongly convicted in future.

The Criminal Procedure and Investigations Act 1996, which came into force on 1 April 1997, firmly reverses the 1992 Court of Appeal judgement in the case of Judith Ward, which made it mandatory for the prosecution to disclose case material to the defence. Since the Ward case, other judgements have either expanded or contracted the extent of the material to which this duty to disclose applies; notable among these are the 1993 M25 Three appeal judgement which reversed the standard set in the Ward case and the 1994 Judicial Review taken on behalf of the Bridgewater Four themselves, which stated that Home Office papers detailing why the Home Secretary had refused a fresh appeal should be disclosed.

The new law knocks the entire concept of generalised disclosure on the head, putting the original onus to disclose evidence in a criminal trial onto the defence who must now effectively state its case in advance, while the Crown can decide which material it considers 'relevant' and therefore needs to disclose. The police lobbied hard for this act to be passed and it also contains a provision for case papers to be destroyed after three years. Had this happened in the Bridgewater case, or even had a half-promised proviso that the period is lengthened pending an appeal hearing been applied, the most recent test on Molloy's confession could never have been carried out and the men would still be rotting in gaol.

### The Criminal Cases Review Commission

One of the biggest hurdles facing wrongfully convicted prisoners has always been that once they lost their initial appeal, all decisions on whether their case could have another hearing lay in the hands of the Home Secretary and his faceless 'C3' department. The Royal Commission on Criminal Justice, which was set up following the release of the Birmingham 6 in 1991, recommended that C3 be replaced by an independent body.

After considerable delay, the Criminal Cases Review Commission (CCRC) opened for business this April and promptly declared that its case load was so big it could not cope. In its first week it received 210 cases passed on by C3 and another 41 directly from prisoners or their solicitors. The C3 cases include those of the M25 Three and of James Hanratty, hanged 35 years ago. Both cases were expected to be referred back to the Appeal Court this year, but C3's claim that it 'ran out of time' could now delay them a further three years. Raphael Rowe of the M25 Three spent three weeks in April on hunger-strike in protest against this abuse.

The membership of the CCRC does not inspire confidence. In fact, if it were not so serious for those people whose liberty depends on it, the list would be a joke: the commission is headed by Sir Frederick Crawford, Former Vice-Chancellor of Aston Uni-

versity, plasma scientist and prominent freemason; the 'legally qualified members' comprise the former Assistant Chief Prosecutor for Kent, the former Belfast Coroner, a Chair of the VAT Tribunal, a solicitor who specialises in take-overs and mergers and the current Chief Crown Prosecutor; 'members with knowledge or experience of the Criminal Justice System' are the Assistant Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, the former Deputy Director of the Serious Fraud Office, a consultant forensic psychiatrist, a former member of the parole board and a professor of Criminal Law; finally, the 'lay members' (ordinary decent folk?) are the Chairman of Lloyds Syndicate Loss Reviews, a former Chief Executive of Norfolk County Council and the former Chief Executive of ICI Chlorochemicals!

### Framed prisoners

These new obstacles come on top of the considerable problems already faced by framed prisoners, in particular the extreme difficulties in applying for parole while maintaining your innocence. Prisoners, especially lifers, are expected to show remorse, improve their 'offending behaviour' and 'come to terms with their crime'. All these are impossible if you are not guilty. Sample parole reports on framed prisoners contain such descriptions as: 'Not suitable for release, he has done nothing since the day of his conviction to address his offence', 'Not tackling offending behaviour' etc.

### A few bad apples?

In 1989 the West Midlands Serious Crime Squad was disbanded following allegations of fraud, perjury and corruption. Eleven of its victims were subsequently released from prison on appeal. Almost without exception they were petty criminals who the Squad fitted up for more serious offences by means of forced or forged confessions. DC Perkins, who 'interviewed' Pat Molloy in 1978, was involved in several of the cases which collapsed: as a result of one revelation he was disciplined and fined 13 days pay; in another appeal Lord Lane spoke of Perkins' 'demonstrated unreliability'.

Of course an 'inquiry' was launched, although it was limited to the 1980s thereby excluding the 'investigations' which the Serious Crime Squad carried out into the Birmingham pub bombings and the murder of Carl Bridgewater. The Inquiry lasted 33 months and in 1992 the Director of Public Prosecutions announced that there would be no prosecutions and that all 226 police officers investigated had been cleared of all criminal allegations.

The release of Michael and Vincent Hickey and Jim Robinson, and the clearing of the name of Pat Molloy are a victory for all framed prisoners and a vindication of the dedication and tenacity of Ann Whelan, Michael's mother, who struggled, campaigned and fought day by day, year by year, for the freedom of her son and of the other men. It is a huge victory and a blow against oppression; what the freeing of the Bridgewater men after all this time is not and cannot be called is Justice.

## FREE ALL FRAMED PRISONERS!

**Gary Mills and Tony Poole** - convicted in 1990 of the murder of Hensley Wiltshire. Wiltshire died in police custody and Gary and Tony are carrying the can for the racist brutality of Gloucester police. Both men are in HMP Long Lartin, South Littleton, Evesham, Worcs WR11 5TZ.

**Raphael Rowe, Michael Davies, Randolph Johnson** (The M25 Three) - convicted in 1990 of a series of robberies and murder. There is a convincing case that the true perpetrators gave evidence for the prosecution. Further details from the M25 Campaign, 28 Grimsel Path, London SE5 0TB.

**Winston Silcott** - acquitted on appeal in 1991 of the killing of PC Blakelock during the 1985 Broadwater Farm uprising but still in gaol for another killing, in which he acted in self-defence but received bad legal advice and was wrongly convicted of murder. The state does not care about the man who died in this incident; it is still punishing Winston for the death of PC Blakelock and has initiated a whispering campaign that Winston was freed on 'technicalities' (his confession, like Molloy's, was proven by ESDA testing to be a forgery) and Blakelock's family have said they plan to take a civil prosecution against Winston. Winston Silcott is at HMP Maidstone, County Road, Maidstone, Kent ME14 1UZ.

**Satpal Ram** also killed in self-defence; he was attacked by a racist in a Birmingham restaurant in 1986. Satpal has served nearly 11 years of his life sentence and is nearing the point where his 'tariff' is complete and he could be released on licence; however he refuses to show the required remorse. As a result, the prison system has labelled him a 'control problem' and has him frequently moved to different prisons. As we go to press Satpal is at HMP Wandsworth, Heathfield Road, London SW18 but is likely to move within the next week - telephone our office on 0171 837 1688 to check his whereabouts. Satpal arrived at Wandsworth on 18 April, trussed up in a 'body-belt', was put into a bare strip-cell and denied access to any of his possessions. He responded by going on hunger strike for 16 days. FRFI supporters demonstrated outside Wandsworth on 3 May in support of Satpal's demands to be moved back to the Midlands and treated humanely.

There are many, many other framed prisoners and it is impossible to give details of all of them. A fuller list can be obtained from Conviction, PO Box 522, Sheffield S1 3FF.



# Full Sutton prisoners given traditional Strangeways welcome

In the last FRFI we reported on the 20 January revolt at Full Sutton which left one wing completely demolished and another substantially wrecked – prisoners throughout the country have been referring to the gaol as 'Half Sutton' ever since!

Following the riot, all Category A prisoners from B and C wings were moved to the punishment block (resulting in other prisoners already there being moved as far as Wormwood Scrubs in London) and all the Category B prisoners shipped out to various gaols around the country. The Category A prisoners have now also been relocated.

FRFI has been contacted by relatives of some of the nine men who were sent from Full Sutton to Strangeways prison in Manchester. On arrival they were made to run a gauntlet of screws into the gaol and once inside were told they could only walk along a green line on the floor. A prisoner named Riley stepped off this line and was severely beaten up. The next day he called in the local police, who (surprise, surprise) did not take his allegation of assault seriously.

The nine were initially all located in the punishment block and put on mandatory closed visits but most were subsequently moved to 'normal location' and permitted open visits. The wings of the prison are less restrictive but equally dangerous, particularly when you have been labelled 'prison rioter'. A prisoner named Gilbert was moved onto the wing after a week in the block and immediately beaten up by five screws, purely because he had come from Full Sutton. Another man, Stephen Moody, went on the wing, had a blade of some description planted on him, was moved back to the block for 10 days punishment (despite not being convicted of anything even within the prison's internal kangaroo court 'adjudication' system), at the end of which he refused to return to the wing. He began a hunger strike demanding a move out of Strangeways and remained on

it for over 50 days; a protest which received virtually no publicity, apart from a brief mention by local radio and newspapers in mid-March. Stephen is now in the prison hospital.

Following these beatings, other former Full Sutton prisoners feared they too would be beaten. FRFI

Eddie Ash also refused to go to H wing and was moved to the block. Due to be released later this year, Eddie lost a month's remission for this refusal, the second month he has lost since arriving at Strangeways. He was subsequently assaulted by prison officers in the block, who also poured porridge over what remained of his property; virtually every prisoner moved out of Full Sutton had their belongings destroyed by being drenched in an as yet unidentified substance.

changed. He notes ominously:

'And there is another "left-over" from the bad old days. What made Strangeways a hell-hole was not just the appalling conditions but the domination of a small group of power-crazed, brutal screws.'

These no doubt are the ones who today see it as an act of solidarity with their 'brother officers' at Full Sutton to render the prisoners from that gaol as miserable as possible.

FRFI has also heard from other prisoners who were at Full Sutton on 20 January. Keith Pringle is in the punishment block at Garth prison; Dessie Cunningham, whose removal to the block on 20 January is said by some to have sparked off the protest, is at Durham prison.

The police have been 'inquiring' into the disturbance for four months now but have so far not actually charged anyone. Their procedure appears to consist of dividing those prisoners present on 20 January into 'suspects' and 'witnesses' – this prior to taking any statements and presumably based on 'character references' from prison staff – and making return visits to both groups, insisting to the 'suspects' that the 'witnesses' have incriminated them and to the 'witnesses' that they should do so. As all the screws disappeared from the landings the moment the trouble started, the police are largely dependent on prisoners giving evidence against one another. They will not find this easy to obtain as even in this day of differential regimes and rewards for informers Full Sutton has retained a relatively high level of solidarity between prisoners.

Full Sutton continues to introduce new restrictions on its remaining prisoners. 'Bang-up' time on Sundays is now 6.30pm and all use of Education Department computers for legal or personal correspondence has been banned. Five prisoners from E wing, deemed likely to organise protest, were ghosted out as a 'preventive' measure.

FRFI will continue to monitor the aftermath of the revolt and sends solidarity greetings to all those prisoners victimised as a result of their presence at Full Sutton on 20 January.

Nicki Jameson



Strangeways had its own landmark uprising in 1990

spoke to the sister of Bill Edmonds who told us that he was being constantly followed around the wing by a group of screws muttering about Full Sutton and unspecified revenge to follow. On 1 April Bill was told he would be moved the next day to H wing where a prison officer who had previously worked in the Full Sutton punishment block worked. He was convinced that if he went to H wing he would be assaulted so refused to go and was put instead in the block. A series of telephone inquiries to the prison from journalists prevented the move and ensured he was instead relocated on the prison's long-termers' wing. Due to constant pressure from Bill's family, he has now been moved to HMP Walton and been told he will be moved near to London in the near future.

Before Strangeways had its own landmark uprising in 1990, it had a fearsome reputation for the 'reception committees' laid on to welcome 'subversive' prisoners from other gaols, either those who arrived singly on 'lay-downs' (in *Inside an English jail*, Irish POW Raymond McLaughlin describes a 'cooler' in Strangeways in 1979 as 'four weeks of bitter, racist abuse from National Front screws') or in groups after protests, like the three prisoners who arrived at Manchester after the 1976 Hull riot and were beaten black and blue as they ran the gauntlet into the prison.

In *Strangeways 1990: a serious disturbance* Eric Allison describes a visit to the 'new' refurbished Strangeways in 1993: much seems to have improved but some things have not

## Prison overcrowding – from mad to worse

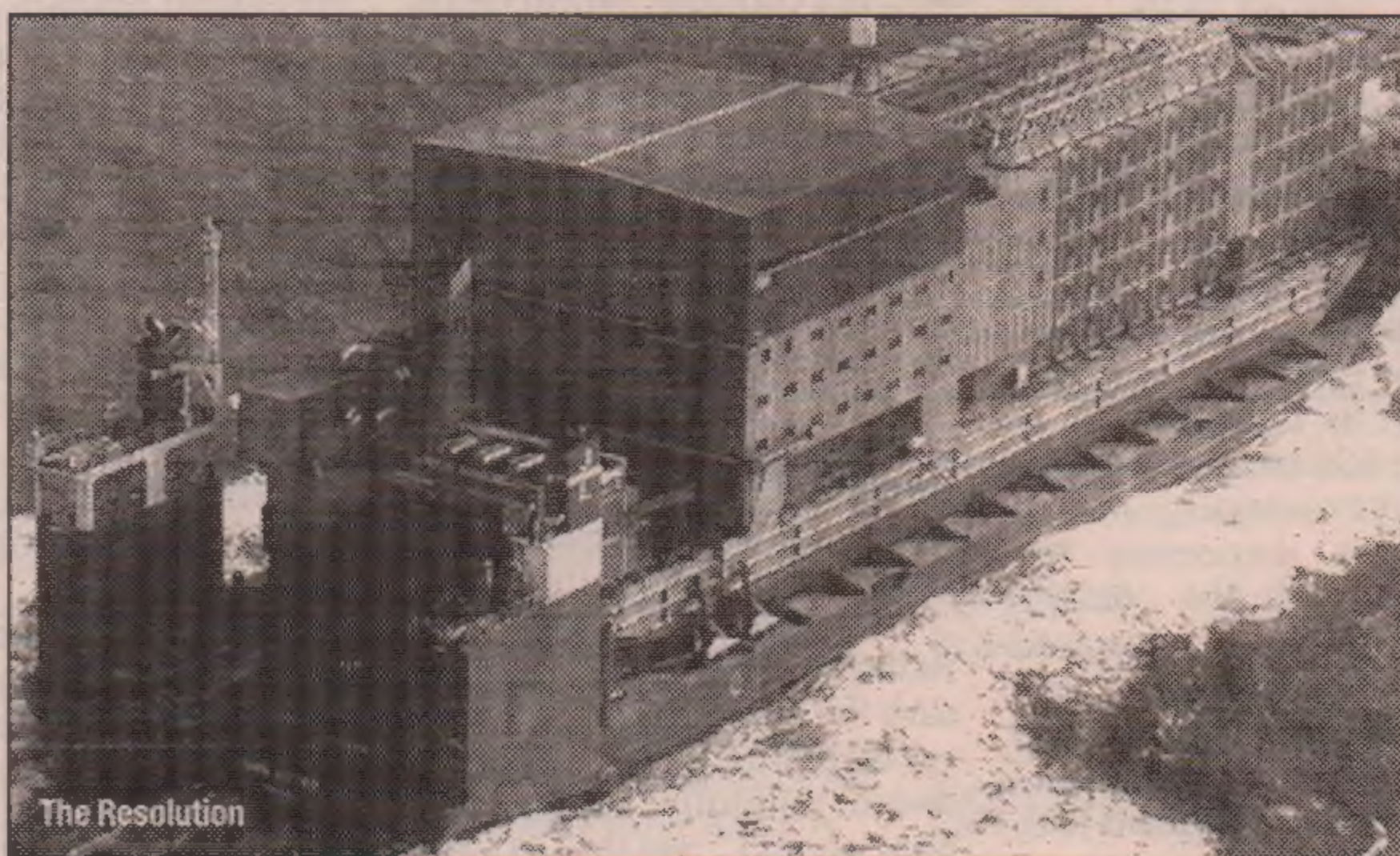
In 1987 the prison system became so overcrowded the government resorted to the emergency measure of housing asylum-seekers on the *Earl William* prison ship, moored off the coast of Harwich. The *Earl William* was a decommissioned car ferry, similar to the one which a short time earlier had sunk at Zeebrugge. As a prison it lasted only until October of that year when it was blown off its moorings by a gale.

Ten years on the system is bursting again. The 60,000 prisoners currently incarcerated in England and Wales alone make the 1987 figure of 48,000 look almost manageable, although even then Britain had the highest prison population in western Europe. And the 1997 version of the *Earl William* has just been installed at Portland Harbour. Despite fierce opposition from local residents, outgoing Home Secret-

ary Michael Howard ensured that the US prison-ship *Resolution* would become Britain's HMP Weare. He could not have achieved this without the parliamentary support of then Labour Shadow Home Secretary Jack Straw.

The *Resolution* is no decommissioned ferry; it is a purpose-built edifice: a floating concrete box. It houses 400 prisoners and cost the British government £5 million to buy and bring over from Hudson Bay.

The government has also given new meaning to all those stupid jokes about prison being a holiday camp by attempting to turn a former Pontin's at Heysham, near Morecambe, into a prison. If the name Heysham rings a bell, it is because of its two nuclear power plants – Heysham 1 and 2 – which are extremely close to the proposed gaol; not such a pleasant place to do time after all.



There appears to be no end to this madness. Like the Tories before them, the 'tough on crime' Labour Party is hell-bent on Crime Bills, minimum sentences, less remission, less bail and more prisoners. It wants to do all this and cut the prison budget. The Prison Service estimates that the prison population will be 66,000 by

the year 2000; given that it rose by 6,000 last year alone, this estimate appears to be a conservative one. New Labour may release imprisoned debtors in the near future but this will only touch the tip of the iceberg they have not only inherited but helped to construct.

Nicki Jameson

## Discrimination against disabled prisoners

Within the criminal justice system, there are many groups who for gender, ethnic and/or racial reasons, are discriminated against. But there is a marginalised group which can include people from any other minority section: people with special needs. 'Prisoners Fightback' is all very well, but what about those who are unable to? What about disabled people in prisons, what happens to them, how do they 'make out'? As a disabled person myself, this has interested me for some years, and now as a research student, I am in a position to find out. This is no easy task though, as in sociological or criminological academic literature in England and Wales the physically disabled offender is non-existent. Invisible. Is it presumed, then, that physically disabled people don't commit crime, or that people in prison don't become disabled due to age, illness or injury? From the apparent lack of facilities and staff training to deal with physically impaired people, to say this group has been marginalised would be a gross understatement.

From what my research has shown me so far, disabled people are usually 'put on the ground floor so they don't have to negotiate stairs'. Unlucky for those who want to take part in association, work or education on the first floor or higher. Some research in Scottish prisons has shown that the occurrence of physical disability within the system is greater than expected, forming a significant part of the prison population. Similar research begun by the Home Office in London suddenly and inexplicably ceased but a probation officer, John Riddle, has carried out what he terms 'primitive research', finding the same and worse results than the Scottish project.

With growing awareness in society of disability issues, it seems a 'deserving' and 'undeserving' polarity has emerged, where care, help and support are available only for those disabled people who fit the right image. Some critics would say, 'they should have thought of the consequences before they committed the crime, it's their own fault'. Conversely a disabled prisoner told me, 'I am not asking for money or to be treated better than others, just to be treated the same, so what is wrong with that?' What indeed?

If any reader has any information which could help with this research, for example concerning people with physical or sensory impairment either in prison or visiting someone in prison, please contact me: Jen Houghton, Haulfre, Ffriddoedd Road, Bangor, Gwynedd. ■

### Useful contacts

Haven Distribution supplies free radical books to prisoners within Britain and Ireland. Write to Haven Distribution, BM Haven, London WC1N 3XX.

The Terry O'Halloran Memorial Fund sends books, magazines, newspapers and radios to prisoners in British and Irish gaols. Write to Terry O'Halloran Memorial Fund, BCM Box 5960, London WC1N 3XX.

Prison Writing is a twice-yearly journal of writing by serving prisoners. Subscriptions are: Institutions £15, Individuals £12, Prisoners £5 and Overseas £20. New writing is always welcome. Write to Prison Writing, PO Box 478, Sheffield S3 8YX.

The Prisoners Advice Service has moved to Unit 305, Hatton Square, 16-16a Baldwins Gardens, London EC1 7RJ; telephone 0171 405 8090.



# Two futures for working class education

No one in Britain speaks for working class education anymore. The ruling class parties are interested only in how to shape education for the needs of capitalism. The teacher unions accept this agenda; what little opposition they once offered has long since been abandoned. The social-democratic left and parents' groups limit their protests to more resources and the defence of comprehensive education. It would appear there is no alternative for the working class. A recent book by Michael Barber, guru of New Labour education thinking, seems to confirm this dismal prospect. Another new book, however, about education in Cuba, demonstrates there is a radical and liberating alternative once the working class takes control of its own future. JIM CRAVEN examines the arguments.

**S**chooling the Revolution, by Theodore MacDonald, recounts the remarkable advances in Cuban education since 1959. MacDonald tells us how illiteracy was virtually wiped out within a year in what he describes as 'one of the truly great achievements of mankind'.

Later, these workers were able to take part-time courses to improve their skills and to enter special new colleges – opportunities they couldn't have dreamed of just five years before. Within ten years, every Cuban child had access to primary education, 90 per cent had pre-school places and over 80 per cent were enrolled in secondary schools: figures that are comparable to most rich nations and are way ahead of any other poor Third World country. In the first three years following the revolution university entrance increased fivefold, while between 1960 and 1980 there was a tenfold increase in the number of students matriculating from secondary schools. But it doesn't stop there: lifelong learning is a reality in Cuba. A staggering three out of every five Cuban adults has enrolled in some form of part-time education.

However, it is not just the facts and figures that make the story of the Cuban revolution in education so impressive. The greatest achievement of Cuban education is the way it has affected people's lives. From the beginning, its primary motive was the right of Cuban people to be free from ignorance and oppression. It was a matter of human dignity, of human development.

MacDonald tells the story of Angelo, who remembered schools before the revolution with boxes for seats and a drunken teacher, where the only thing he learned was that England still had kings and queens like Spain. In 1960, after the revolution, he achieved the whole of his primary schooling in two years. We hear of Isabel, an arrogant little rich girl, who found some sense of humanity through the revolution; of Yolanda, who lived in a

hut before her father died, who was found a home by the revolution and then taught to read and write when she was 11 years old in a makeshift school set up in the old gambling casino. Yolanda now works as a financial analyst for the Department of Trade. She remembers promising to model herself on Che and says 'Even now that is my ideal.'

MacDonald points out the ideology behind the Cuban system. 'From the beginning, the guiding principle was the fairly simple one that it is immoral to make education available to only a select few.' He elaborates by quoting Che: 'We are building a new society – a just and humane society in which exploitation of man by man will have no part. As part of that our schools need to form the New Man – one who is not motivated by greed or self-interest but by the good of all.'

These sentiments translate in practice to a set of principles which underpin the whole Cuban educational system. These principles include:

- emulation, not competition. There is a belief that most children are capable of achieving the highest standards and that everyone should help each other to do so.
- The integration of mental and physical labour. Even pre-school children help out in the school gardens. Ivory towers have been torn down.
- Collectivity and internationalism, not individualism. This holds just as much weight as academic achievement in judging a child's success.
- Openness, democracy and integration with the community. The purposes, aims and policies of education are discussed openly. Parents and children, local factories and farms are closely involved with schools.

In these ways, everyone becomes involved in education. Education responds to revolutionary developments in society and in turn drives those developments forward. As MacDonald points out, 'What has been achieved in Cuban



A class of children at José Antonio Echeverría School in Pinar del Río, Cuba

schooling cannot really be separated from its total revolutionary context and experience, and any society which would learn from the developments of Cuban schooling must inevitably also learn from its social revolution.'

It is illuminating to compare MacDonald's inspiring view of education in socialist Cuba with Michael Barber's book *The Learning Game*, which, according to the subtitle, also claims to be 'arguments for a revolution in education'.

The Cuban revolution was based on optimism. At the heart of Barber's thinking, however, is fear – the same fear that is shaking so many of Labour's middle class supporters; the fear that their cosy and privileged world is under threat. As the capitalist crisis deepens, chaos looms. Barber fears the consequences of the vast divide between rich and poor; he fears the growing isolation, alienation and indifference among young people (which Barber regards as a moral dilemma); he fears the rise of what he calls 'the underclass'; he fears the economic strength of the Far East; he fears environmental catastrophe.

Barber's only solution to these 'problems', however, is education. Like so many other middle class intellectuals, he has to believe that education alone can change the world. He will not consider radical political and economic change, the overthrow of what is at the root of all his fears – capitalism – for he will not risk losing his privilege. Indeed, Barber will not even contemplate a different order of things. For him, the 'globalised market economy' is taken for granted as the only conceivable world order. Not surprisingly, he misses no opportunity throughout the book to sneer at socialism.

You might expect that Barber's educational plan to save the world would be a radical departure. In fact, his ideas sound painfully familiar. No one should remain in any doubt that the Labour Party will be even more ruthless than the Tories in forcing education to follow the dictates of capitalism. Barber wants a massive and rapid increase in academic standards. The curriculum must be reformed once more, as must testing arrangements and the

exam system. Primary schools will have to concentrate on the basics, whilst at secondary level vocational training and links with industry must increase. Parents must take greater responsibility for their child's education and 'worthies' from business and industry should play a greater role in school as 'education associates'. Teachers

class means less for the working class. He does not say where the money for these and other resources will come from. Indeed, Barber emphasises several times what we already know from Labour's plans, that public spending will be just as restricted as under the Tories. Barber's only hope, again in line with New Labour policy, is to go cap-in-hand to private industry. But since when did capitalists give back their ill-gained profit in order to provide for the working class? That's where they stole it from in the first place.

Anyhow, there is far more to working class educational disadvantage than teachers and study space. This disadvantage stems partly from working class children's deprivation – poverty, homelessness, malnutrition, lack of transport, the stresses and strains of unemployment, overcrowding and low pay – and partly from the cultural limits to their world: their expectations, ambitions and social confidence. When it comes to getting the best out of the system, the middle class are far better equipped. These disadvantages for the working class are endemic to the class system. They stem from the social and economic relations of capitalism and can never be totally overcome without revolutionising those relations. Compensatory education was tried in the 1960s and 1970s. Its impact was marginal.

Barber's egalitarianism is a sham. It is the social-democratic substitution of equality by equal opportunity which, even if it operated fully, simply allows those in a privileged position to keep in front and feel morally justified in doing so. Barber says not a word about ending Britain's elitist system; about ending private education,

and he doesn't even begin to explain how more education will solve the environmental crisis. Everybody else but Barber seems to understand that it is not ignorance that is killing our planet – it's the uncontrolled greed of capitalism.

Barber outrageously maintains that his plans are for the good of everyone. This serves merely to hide his central concern – the education of the middle class and the survival of the state system from which they derive their privilege. Barber recognises that 'the end users of education are the employers'. With capitalism in crisis, the ruling class will not continue to fund state education unless it delivers the goods. Indeed Barber, in a recent interview, explicitly recognised that unless 'standards' improved, schools would be privatised. As it is, more and more of the middle class will desert state education unless they can be assured of a more secure and privileged position within that system. Barber tries to obscure this central concern by suggesting special out-of-school learning centres and incentive bonuses for teachers to work in deprived areas. But with limited resources for state education, more for the middle

grammar schools and other forms of selection. In fact, at the heart of his drive for improved standards is a most reactionary, individualistic plan – the Individual Learning Promise, or 'fast tracking', as Blair calls it.

This must sound wonderful to all those middle class parents who want their child to 'get on' without having to be bothered with working class 'troublemakers'.

In contrast to the principles of Cuban education, Barber's principles boil down to competition, individualism and elitism. His attempt to reduce the gulf between academic and vocational education is only to better serve a decadent and dehumanised capitalism, and his 'partnership' between schools

and parents is little more than an attempt to discipline wayward teachers and parents.

Barber talks a lot about improving school organisation, teaching methods and the quality of teachers, and these may have some transient impact on academic standards. However, his hope for a better society that inspires people to new educational heights is not one that capitalism can fulfil. Education is more than filling up people with facts and figures that they can exchange for credentials and the possibility of access to some more privileged sector of the labour market.

In *Schooling the Revolution*, MacDonald points out that in order to learn, people must feel involved in the process; education must have a meaningful purpose for them. Only a small part of this purpose is to do with immediate personal economic gain. Education must also give people a greater sense of dignity and help them to control their own lives. It must help people to relate to a society which they value and which values them. A revolution in education must be part of a liberating experience. This cannot occur if people remain economically and socially oppressed.

The prospects for the majority of working class people is few jobs, low pay, poor conditions, alienating work, stress, insecurity, the prospect of repeated redundancy and retraining, declining health and social services, scarce housing and the threat of a lonely old age. This is the reality facing the majority of people in Britain today and the situation is not going to fundamentally improve under capitalism. Without an alternative vision of society, large numbers of people may participate in the educational rat-race in the hope that their prospects might not decline quite as fast as they otherwise would. By participating these people lend legitimacy to the system. But this scrambling to keep on the treadmill could hardly be described as a liberating educational revolution, even if it does result in more students getting more marks in more exams.

People will not find a sense of dignity and value in a society that treats them as 'flexible labour'. They might go through the motions, but how will they find satisfaction and purpose in training for skills that may never be used? In learning for and about a world order bent only on exploitation and destruction? Large numbers of working class kids have always understood and resisted the debilitating reality of state education under capitalism. Even if it is wrapped up in the hypocritical terms of 'equal opportunities' and 'fulfilling a child's potential', any attempt to impose a 'revolution' in capitalist state education will be met with the same stubborn resistance.

Professor Michael Barber has resigned from his post as Dean of New Initiatives at the University of London's Institute of Education to become David Blunkett's Special Adviser on Standards and Effectiveness in schools.

■ *Schooling the Revolution* Theodore MacDonald, Praxis Press 1996, £12.99

■ *The Learning Game* Michael Barber, Gollancz 1997, £12.99



Pupils of the Ridings School, Yorkshire



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## June Taylor 12 June 1943-10 March 1997



We were deeply saddened by the sudden death of June at the beginning of March. She had made an invaluable and unstinting contribution to the production of FRFI since its launch in 1979. We will miss her greatly as a friend and comrade. FRFI sends its deepest sympathy to her family and friends.

**Were you at the dockers' march and Reclaim the Streets party on Saturday 12 April?**

If you were arrested or injured, or saw someone arrested or injured, or know someone who was arrested – contact  
Legal Defence & Monitoring  
Group, c/o BM Box Haven, London  
WC1N 3XX Tel: 0181 533 7116

## LETTERS

write to FRFI BCM Box 5909 London WC1N 3XX

e-mail: rcgrfi@easynet.co.uk

## Sundiata Acoli

*Sundiata Accoli writes: 'I've been receiving FRFI regularly and always find it informative and inspiring. I appreciate the great job you are doing and particularly the article you did on Assata Shakur and the follow-up letter by Steven Katsineris on my behalf.' We print the following article at his request.*

**S**undiata's appeal against his parole denial and 20-year hit by the state of New Jersey Parole Board has been filed in the state's Appellate Court.

Sundiata, an ex-Black Panther, has been imprisoned since 1973 when he and his companions, Assata Shakur and Zayd Shakur, were ambushed by state troopers while driving down the New Jersey Turnpike. During the shooting Zayd and a state trooper were killed, another trooper was

wounded and Assata and Sundiata were wounded and captured and subsequently sentenced to life in prison.

After 21 years' imprisonment in the harshest US penitentiaries, Trenton State Prison, USP Marion and USP Leavenworth, and with an exemplary prison record, Sundiata came up for parole in 1994. He was not permitted to return to New Jersey to appear before the parole board in person but was only allowed to participate from USP Leavenworth via telephone without an attorney present. After a 20-minute telephone hearing, Sundiata was denied parole and given a 20-year hit, meaning he must do 20 more years before coming up for parole again.

People concerned about justice are urged to write personal letters to the judges, urging them to rescind the 20 year hit and release Sundiata on parole due to the 24 years he has already served, even

though he did not kill the trooper, his advanced age of 60 years, his exemplary prison work, scholastic (all 'A's) and conduct records, his 13 year professional computer background before imprisonment and numerous job offers waiting which will enable him to be a productive member of the community, that his release would be in the interests of justice since Sundiata was a primary target of the FBI's illegal COINTELPRO activities against the Black Panther Party during the 1960s/70s, and for any other reason you wish to add.

Send letters to Judges Long and Cuff at the Superior Court of New Jersey, Appellate Division, CN006, Trenton, NJ 08625, USA, and send copies of your letters to the Sundiata Freedom Campaign, PO Box 5538, Harlem, NY 10027, USA. Donations are always welcome as are letters of support to Sundiata Acoli #39794-066, USP Allenwood, PO Box 3000, White Deer, PA 167887, USA.

## Smash the JSA

**T**he RCG has long pointed out that one consequence of imperialism is splits are created within the working class of the imperialist countries themselves.

The RCG, in stark contrast to the rest of the British 'left', who gravitate to the relatively privileged sections of the working class in the Labour and trade union movement, argues for a political orientation to people who have a *real material interest* in opposing capitalism.

It is astonishing, then, that in FRFI 135 you run no specific article on the Jobseeker's Allowance.

The JSA has nothing to do with helping the unemployed to find decent jobs. It has everything to do with forcing unemployed people into even deeper poverty by cutting benefits and either disallowing new claims or coercing existing claimants of the unemployment register. The average monthly fall in unemployment of 19,000 has shot up to 63,000 since the introduction of the JSA. The fall for January 1997 was 67,000 – not because of any increase in the labour market but because of people being refused benefits. It is

indicative that the Bank of England and the Treasury now take the Labour Force Survey (which measures availability for work rather than eligibility for benefits) as the major explanatory guide to the number of jobless.

As I received issue 135 in early February, we stood on the eve of the widespread implementation of Project Work, already piloted in places such as Hull. This is a slave labour scheme of 'work for your dole' aimed at those unemployed over two years. As such it has the potential to divide the unemployed and to drive down the wages of low-paid workers even further. (In New York City, 20,000 former City workers have now been replaced by welfare claimants on 'Workfare' schemes. But, of course, that couldn't happen here!)

Opposing the JSA might be a hard campaign to fight. Analogies with the Poll Tax are fairly spurious, not only in terms of numbers affected, but also because claimants want money from the state rather than vice versa. This gives the state the power of withholding benefits from protesters. One important consequence of the JSA is that benefit can be denied entirely, rather than simply cut.

On the other hand, the existence of many active anti-JSA groups associated with the Groundswell movement gives cause for optimism that the anti-JSA campaign is going to be far more than a token effort. Already there exists strong and growing opposition to the role of the CPSA union and its supporters' line that dole workers are 'only doing their job' by implementing the JSA. The fact that those immediately involved in implementing the JSA did not dream it up makes no difference. Unemployed people are being oppressed by 'the system', but implementing that system are individuals who have names, addresses and consciences.

Here trade union reformism is starkly revealed as an ideology and practice where it is seen as perfectly acceptable for one group of workers to progress by oppressing another group.

I hope that FRFI will be covering this potentially important struggle fully in future editions.

No dole slavery! No wage slavery!

**TED TALBOT**  
Nottingham Campaign against the JSA  
(in a personal capacity)

## For anti-imperialist solidarity, peace and friendship

**A night of international and revolutionary music to raise money for the 14th Youth World Festival**

Thursday 15 May 8-11pm  
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*Organised by British Preparatory Committee for the World Festival.*

## China and Afghanistan

**I**would like to thank Comrade Keith Bennett for his response to my letter about Afghanistan. Presumably he felt that the term 'Maoist' in my letter referred, among others, to his tendency, and felt obliged to reply.

I agree with Keith that one should think carefully before criticising the Chinese Communist Party at a time when Beijing-bashing is all the rage. However, we cannot learn from the mistakes of history if we pretend they did not happen, and for this reason I decided to criticise a particular policy of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in a period which has now passed.

The fundamental point of Keith's argument is his assertion that 'a pro-Soviet government in [Afghanistan] posed a threat to China's security in the late 1970s and early-to-mid 1980s.' It's not that I 'don't want to face it', Keith: it's just that I think it isn't true. Nor have I ever seen any convincing evidence that the Soviet Union had any aggressive intentions towards China – and it is not for want of looking. The CCP's erroneous view of the Soviet Union as 'social

imperialist' or militarily 'hegemonist', as in the revisionist 'three worlds' theory, led it to clearly take the same side as imperialism against progress in relation to both Afghanistan and Indochina. Its policies at the UN helped to bring about the 'Mujaheddin' victory in Afghanistan, and aided anti-popular forces in Cambodia. In 1989 it launched an aggressive war against Vietnam in which atrocities were committed and the lives of thousands of Chinese soldiers wasted. China has still not admitted that it lost that war.

These have been the disastrous results of the false 'three worlds' theory. If we wish to avoid similar disasters in the future, then we need to weed out the 'three worlds' theory and other wrong ideas. Sweeping history under the carpet will not help us to do so.

Let me conclude by saluting the giant contributions made to progress by the Chinese communists in other places and at other times which far outweigh their mistakes. I am sure I can speak for the RCG in saying so.

**JONATHAN COHEN**  
Taiwan, China

## Britain guilty of genocide in Iraq

**L**ast November a United Nations official tagged a dead child in a Baghdad hospital after judging that the infant was over one and under five years old. The UN announced that 750,000 such children had died, 'officially'.

On 14 December, former US Attorney General Ramsey Clark issued two 'supplemental criminal complaints' against the USA, President Clinton, the UK and John Major as well as officials and ambassadors to the UN.

These charges are supplemental to 19 charges issued shortly after the ceasefire in early 1991. Testimony was gathered by 20 commissions of inquiry set up around the world, and presented to the International War Crimes Tribunal in New York in 1992. Among those who participated in the British Commission of Inquiry was Tony Benn. On 29 February 1992, 21 international jurists, including Britain's Lord Tony Gifford, delivered a unanimous verdict of guilty 'beyond reasonable doubt' on all charges.

The supplemental criminal acts related to the 'enforcement of an economic blockade and sanctions against the people of Iraq from 6 August 1990 to this date with the full knowledge constantly communicated that the blockade and sanctions were depriving the people of Iraq of the essentials to support and protect human life'. Every major UN agency concerned, including UNICEF and the UN

Food and Agriculture Organisation, has 'described the deaths, injuries and suffering directly caused by the sanctions'.

Yet Britain is still enforcing these 'genocidal' sanctions in total disregard for the 'direct physical injury to the majority of the population of Iraq, serious permanent injury to a substantial minority... and death to more than 1,500,000 people, including 750,000 children under five years of age.' Britain is thus continuing to commit 'crimes against humanity as defined in the Nuremberg Charter'. This 'massive attack on the entire civilian population' violates Articles 48, 51, 52, 54 and 55 of Protocol 1 Additional to the Geneva Convention, 1977.

It might have been hoped that an incoming Labour administration would use all of its powers to end the shame of the sanctions, the chosen means of enforcement of the Hitlerian 'new world order'. This will sadly not be the case. Labour front bench spokesman Derek Fatchett said in March there would be no change in Middle East policy under a future Labour government.

It is therefore up to us, as humanitarian and progressive people, to campaign to end these crimes and to oppose the use of sanctions as a method of warfare. Further information from the International Commission of Inquiry on Economic Sanctions, BM 2966, London WC1N 3XX, tel: 0171 436 4636 fax: 0171 436 4638.

**KEVIN HEMSLEY**  
London

## Birmingham Prisoners' Solidarity

**T**he picket of Brixton prison in protest at the beating of Satpal by screws (featured in Jan/Feb FRFI) was organised by Birmingham Prisoners' Solidarity (BPS).

BPS was formed by people who were centrally involved in the Free Satpal Campaign (FSC). We see our group as a development which aims to fight frame-ups and fight for prisoners' rights in general.

The fight to free Satpal Ram should be fought within the framework of a fight for justice for all framed prisoners that builds

solidarity with Satpal's fight against brutalisation, alongside all prisoners' struggles against degradation, for dignity and prisoners' rights.

This is a method of building the necessary alliances which are key to winning Satpal's and all innocent prisoners' freedom and to improving prisoners' conditions.

Racism was central to Satpal's conviction, to the attack on him and to the state's refusal to release an innocent man. But a struggle against the criminal (in)justice system and the whole racist British state is what is necessary. Satpal's struggle is part of a broader struggle. Prisoner and justice struggles are part of the

class struggle which demand the support and participation of the working class and its organisations. Such struggle is international.

BPS's activities so far have been for Mumia Abu Jamal, Roisin McAliskey, Satpal Ram and Gary Mills and Tony Poole. We have sent out an open letter about solidarity with Satpal Ram, in which we propose the setting up of a national Free Satpal network. All groups and individuals who want to campaign for Satpal will have a say in the network.

For copies of the BPS Newsletters 1 and 2, open letter and latest info on Satpal and Gary and Tony, send a SAE to: Birmingham

Prisoners' Solidarity, PO Box 3241, Saltley, Birmingham, B8 3DP.

**PETE BLOOMER**  
Birmingham

## FRFI on-line

**C**ongratulations on your new website. It was good to read you again. Recently I had difficulty getting hold of FRFI at leftwing bookshops, but I found FRFI right away when I carried out a web search. It is a great idea to put articles on the web. Although the internet and computers are beyond

the reach of most folks expense-wise, it is still an important means of communication that cannot be easily controlled. This is especially significant when one considers the length the bourgeois state will go to to suppress the communist message in other forums of political debate. The dates of meetings and literature should be advertised, too. If you need some help to develop your website let me know.

**PETER**  
cox@easynet.co.uk

The RCG/FRFI website is on:  
<http://easyweb.easynet.co.uk/~rcgrfi/rcgrfi.htm>



# FIGHT RACISM

# FIGHT IMPERIALISM

# FIGHT

# poverty pay

**'What our experiences show us is that it is possible to change things, that if you stand up for your rights you can get them.'**

PolyGram's largest UK compact disc manufacturing operation is based in Blackburn, Lancashire. Sharing the same site and buildings of its parent company Phillips, it currently produces 250,000 CDs a day.

With hundreds of the most fashionable names in pop music on its books, including The Cardigans, U2, Sheryl Crowe, The Beautiful South and The Cranberries, it is a world leader in the multimillion-pound music industry. Its classical section alone accounts for 40 per cent of the world market. Additionally, with the sudden boom in CD-ROM information technology, PolyGram is now positioning itself in the very lucrative global market of computer software, computer games and educational aids.

Like all the other multinational companies PolyGram, in its attempts to reduce production costs and maximise profits, has started to 'out-source' some of its departments. Formerly in-house, PolyGram's packaging is now being done by a company trading as M&S Packaging (Blackburn) Ltd. Situated only 300 yards from PolyGram on the same site, M&S has to collect the CDs, put them in their plastic cases with a cover insert, wrap them in cellophane and return them to PolyGram for dispatch. The whole procedure is constantly monitored and supervised by PolyGram managerial and quality control staff. Even the costing of the work is determined by PolyGram.

## Slave labour

To understand why this apparently needless operation takes place we need only look at the work conditions of the employees of both companies. PolyGram employees work four 12-hour days on and six days off, all have full-time contracts and the lowest rate of pay is £6 per hour. They also get full sick pay and paid holiday leave. They have a pension scheme and full trade union recognition rights. For the workers of M&S conditions are appalling. There are four shifts of 10 people classed as full time, although none of them have contracts. Each work four 12-hour days with four days off, followed by four 12-hour nights. The monthly salary is £691 gross per month, equivalent to about £3.70 per hour. There is no paid holiday leave or sick pay. Supporting these 'core teams' are people supplied by an agency on a 'when needed' basis.

The agency which supplies these workers is called UK Recruitment. Its directors are the same David and Kate McCarthy who own M&S Packaging. UK Recruitment staff are, in the main, Asian women, school leavers and people forced there because of Jobseeker's Allowance rules: they are paid only £3 an hour. Their jobs are described as 'stand-up' and they are expected to ask permission to go to the toilet. They can be asked to work at any time with as little as an hour's notice. Although promised a full day's work, it is not uncommon for them to be sent home after only a couple of hours.

Some of the women are forced to work there in order to satisfy the Immigration Department that they can support their spouses. One worker was promised a letter saying she was permanent: nine months later she has still not received it.

Security cameras are sited at either end of the production area, recording people's every move. There is also a camera in the rest-room that can

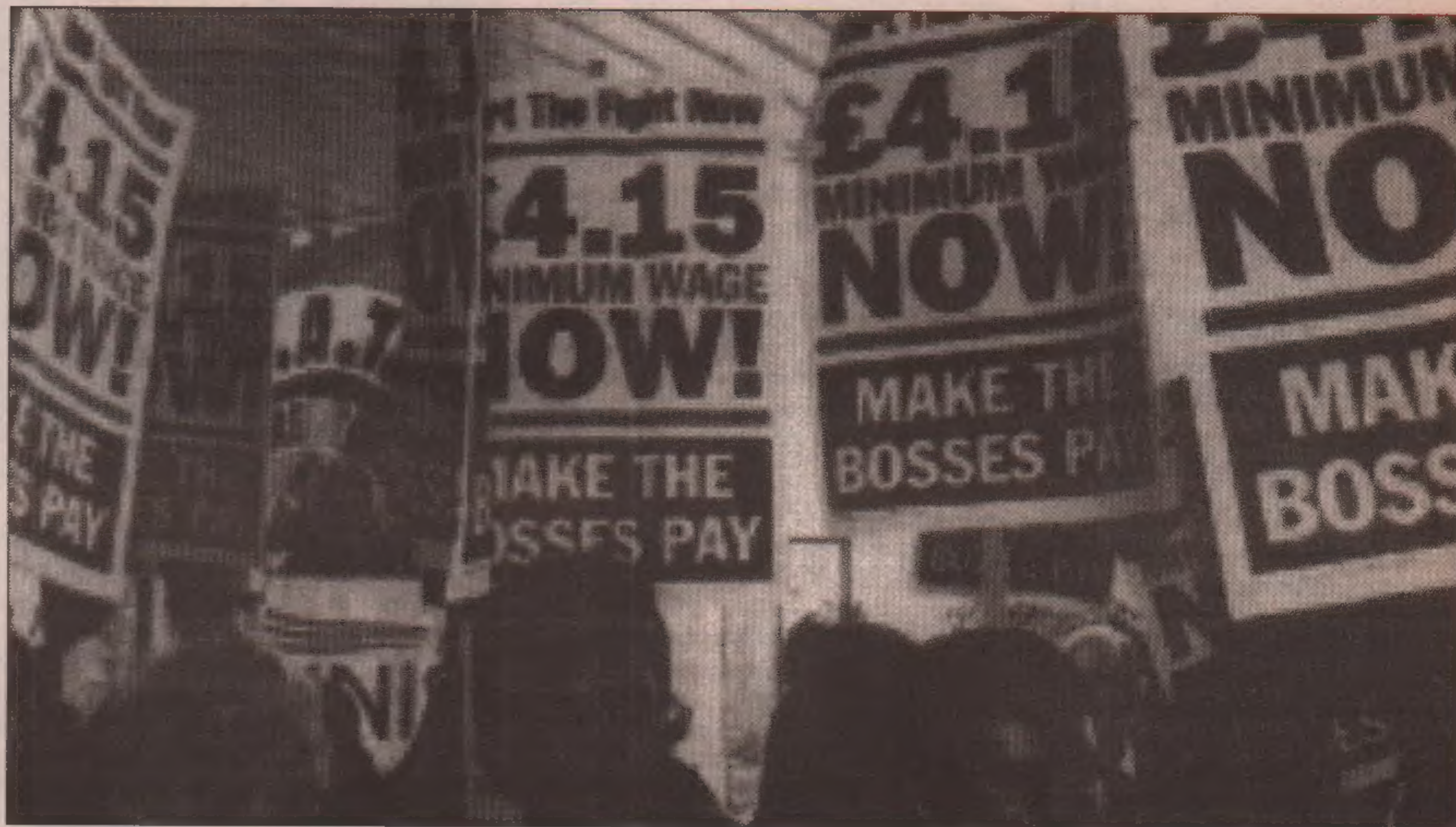
**At the sharp end of globalisation, workers are forced to live on poverty pay, without employment or trade union rights. In Britain today, only 35 per cent of all employees are now in full-time tenured jobs. 3.9 million workers earn less than £4.00 per hour, 1.5 million less than £3.25 per hour. 800,000 women workers earn less than £2.50 per hour. The average wage of those moving from unemployment into a job is a mere £100 per week. Ten million workers are without employment rights because they have been in their current job for less than 2 years. This is the real working class, where trade unionists, socialists and communists worth their salt should be organising. With Labour's stress on moving from welfare to work, we can expect the Benefits Agency to step up its collusion with all sorts of cowboy agencies. NIGEL COOK describes how, under Jobseeker's Allowance regulations, people are forced off the dole into oppressive jobs with scandalous rates of pay.**

monitor people entering and leaving. During the day, the McCarthys bring their dogs with them and allow them to roam around the factory. When they shit, any worker can be told to clear it up.

Overall, the working environment is oppressive. Supervisors are obsessed with efficiency. Some of them are abusive and seem to enjoy humiliating and bullying the workers. This abuse can range from turning the radio off to delaying tea or lunch breaks or sending people home for the pettiest of reasons. Whilst not limited to them, most of this abuse is suffered by the UK Recruitment staff.

Wages are another problem. Many UK Recruitment staff have discrepancies with their wages; often not being paid correctly for the number of hours they have worked. Some have not been paid at all and have given up trying to get their money. This is not surprising, considering they have to travel to the office on days they are not working, only to be told that the person dealing with the wages is not available.

M&S staff also have difficulty getting their correct wages on time. My salary for March should have been £691. I received only £184. On finally



getting to speak to Dave McCarthy, he told me I probably could not have it until 15 April – almost three weeks later. I had not received any money for the last four weeks. £184 to feed me and my son for seven weeks! Other workers had similar problems, some being £70 short and one woman being £640 short.

## Resistance

M&S is currently being run by a court-appointed administrator. This was the excuse given by McCarthy for not wanting to pay me. When I spoke to the administrator he apparently had been told by McCarthy to expect a call from some guy being awkward over a few quid short in his wages. On hearing the true amount of this 'few quid', the administrator sent me a cheque for £470 the same day.

We organised a public meeting for the following week to discuss forming a union to fight back against the appalling way we have been treated. Amongst the 30 or so people who attended were three representatives of Swift Employment Services, another job agency firm. Swift is the company which has taken M&S to the debtors' court. They used to supply M&S with agency staff but, they told us, McCarthy owed them over £100,000. Instead of paying, he opened up his own agency, UK Recruitment. The Swift representatives also admitted that they had met with PolyGram with a view to taking on the packaging contract.

Having thanked the Swift reps for their information, we told them that this meeting wasn't an M&S creditors meeting but about our rights and to organise against our appalling conditions. They claimed we had a 'common interest' since they were our prospective employers. We asked how much they paid per hour. When they replied '£3', we put them out. Swift Employment Services plc – financial year 1995-96 turnover: £3,567,227.

In building for the meeting we found a lot of support in the local Brookhouse area, with most shops only too happy to display our posters. Talking with people in the community we were told that they knew of a relative or friend who had worked at M&S or UK and had had similar problems – not being paid or

being treated like dirt.

As I was leafleting outside M&S one evening as the 10 o'clock shift came off, McCarthy and his chauffeur sped into the car park. McCarthy jumped out of the car and demanded that I go with him to his office. When I refused, saying the strong smell of drink on his breath and his obviously angry state intimidated me, he said 'You are suspended on full pay'. When I finished leafleting and started to make my way home, McCarthy and his chauffeur followed me in the car. They drove at speed right up behind me, overtook me and then drove towards me again. This intimidation continued for a few miles before they finally gave up and went back to the pub. In the morning I went to work and was not surprised to find I was not suspended. If McCarthy doesn't want to pay me when I do work, he is hardly going to pay me for not working.

Despite assurances given to us in March about our wages being paid in full and on time, this did not happen. April's salary was due on the last Friday. McCarthy decided to delay this for almost a week. I and my colleagues on 'A' shift went to his office en masse and demanded our money. After an hour of arguing with the production manager, he got McCarthy to pay us. The other three shifts who remained quiet did not get their wages until the following week.

What our experiences show us is that it is possible to change things, that if you stand up for your rights you can get them. If you don't, you won't. People are joining the union and we intend to approach the McCarthys soon for recognition rights. One small victory is that the McCarthys no longer let their dogs roam through the workplace – they know we won't clear up after them any more. In an attempt to undermine us, the McCarthys have promised everyone contracts, although they have been very vague about when such contracts will materialise. We know that the union will not fully protect casual workers, but it is a start. And we also know that it is in workplaces like M&S up and down the country where the real working class exists, that opposition to casualisation and low pay has to be built.

## Bakers strike against low pay!

Sixty-five bakers at the Amaouti Bakery in Tottenham, north London, walked out on Sunday 13 April in protest over slave-labour pay and conditions. They managed to sustain the strike until 2 May when, following a meeting at ACAS, the boss sacked all the striking workers. Strikers Sayed Ismail and Abid Kadir Hassaan explained why they took strike action:

'To give you an example of what it is like here – they never increase wages. People who have been working here eight years get the same as someone who's just started. We never have reliable working hours. From one week to another we don't know what hours we're going to be working.'

'The "permanent" staff are entitled to two weeks paid holiday a year but then the boss always tries to find excuses to cut your entitlement. Casual staff don't get any holiday pay and stay casual until they say so. There's no fixed time after which you are made "permanent".'

'We're forced to work here because there's no option. The people who work here are mainly Somali, with some from Turkey; 90 per cent come here as asylum seekers or refugees. Most people don't have the language to communicate their feelings to people. They come to this factory because they hear about it from friends. They don't know the system of employment or their rights. This is the reason why they are so poorly paid.'

The bakery workers are paid £3.37 an hour for a 12 hour day, six days a week. The only break they get is an hour for lunch. They were fighting for £4 an hour (day shift), £4.50 (night shift), three weeks paid holiday a year and recognition for a workplace representative union committee.

This is the sort of company which lies behind the 'clean' face of Tesco, Safeways and British Bakeries, to whom Amaouti distribute their pitta bread. Around 90 per cent of Amaouti's bread goes to Tesco stores throughout the country. Last year Tesco made £675 million profit.

Strikers say that the scab workers (including school leavers recruited by agencies such as HMS Personnel) did not have the food hygiene certificates required for this kind of job. When Tesco's inspectors visited, the bakery had to be hurriedly cleaned up for the 'surprise' inspection.

Information provided by Haringey Solidarity Group